The Waste Hierarchy

The Waste Hierarchy is a useful tool for guiding our decisions and actions regarding waste prevention and management, both at an individual level and in terms of business waste. It ranks waste management options according to what is best for the environment.

It gives top priority to preventing waste in the first place. When waste is created, it gives priority to preparing it for re-use, then recycling, then recovery, and last of all disposal (e.g. landfill).



Reduce

Consider how your organisation can use less material in design and manufacture, and in the delivery of products and services; keeping products for longer and using less hazardous materials.

Re-use

Checking, cleaning, repairing, refurbishing, whole items or spare parts will prolong working life and facilitate re-use. Designing products or packaging which can be re-used (without the need for remanufacture) or redistribution to others.

Recycle

Segregating waste for remanufacture into new substances or products. Includes composting if it meets quality standards. This saves energy over manufacture from raw materials (recycling aluminium saves 95% of energy compared to smelting new materials, recycling plastic saves 88% of energy) but cannot be done indefinitely.

Recover

Incineration of waste with heat being used to generate electricity or district heating. Avoids landfill but needs close control on emissions to air of pollutants.

Disposal

Generally, to regulated landfill sites but there are problems with open dumps and disposal in less economically developed countries which leads to pollution of the environment. Greenhouse gas emissions from landfill can also be significant.



For further support please contact a Carbon Charter advisor.