



The amount of recycling Bristolians are binning as general waste has increased, latest analysis shows

Almost one-third of what's in our black wheelie bins is recyclable food

Latest research shows that the percentage of recyclable materials being thrown away in Bristol's general waste wheelie bins has increased from 44% to 53%, taking a toll on the environment and costing the city millions of pounds in disposal costs.

More recyclable materials are being incorrectly binned as general waste, with recyclable food waste making up nearly a third (31%) of the average household wheelie bin.

As well as the recyclable food waste, an additional 22% of Bristol's bins are made up of other recyclable materials such as plastic, metal, glass, card, paper, and garden waste, all of which can be recycled directly from Bristol's homes via weekly household collections.

Bristol Waste Company, along with Bristol City Council, are urging residents to work with them to recycle more, using the kerbside recycling containers, the household reuse and recycling centres and utilising recycling schemes with local businesses and supermarkets.

The impact of throwing away recycling as general waste is bad news for our city and for the planet:

- **Environmental impact:** putting materials like food waste, plastic, cans and glass out to be recycled means more things can be made from recycled materials, rather than producing brand new ones. This reduces carbon usage and helps the environment.
- **Increased costs for disposal:** general waste disposal costs our city millions of pounds each year, and with policy change on the horizon, this amount is only going to increase. In 2024, Bristol spent more than £10 million disposing of household general waste. By adding recyclable materials into the general waste, Bristol is throwing away valuable resources unnecessarily. As much as £5 million could have been saved last year – enough to run the city's libraries five times over.
- **Lost revenue for the city:** recyclable materials in the right containers can be sold, generating revenue for the city and reducing demand on public funds. In 2024, the recycling Bristolians put into their recycling containers earned the city around £4.5 million, money which goes back into the city's essential services and reduces pressure on public funds. If those materials had gone into the general waste, it would have cost more than £8 million in disposal fees.
- **Future carbon penalties:** planned environmental regulations will mean tougher financial penalties for disposing of general waste which will cost the city millions of pounds more unless Bristol improves its recycling rates.

When placed in the correct recycling container, valuable materials like plastic, metal, food waste, cardboard, paper, and even things like batteries and small electrical goods, can be recycled directly from Bristol's homes via weekly household collections. Correctly recycled materials reduce our environmental impact and earn the city money as they are sold to manufacturers, generating revenue which goes back into providing the city's essential services and reducing the pressure on public funds.

The value of recyclable materials fluctuates with market trends, seasonal demands and global legislation. For example, in 2024 every tonne of recyclables rescued from the general waste and put into those recycling containers, made about £340 difference for the city. In 2024, Bristol Waste collected 64,698 tonnes of recycling from the city's kerbsides earning the city £4.5 million in revenue. If this had been collected as general waste, it would have cost the city £8.3 million.

Ricky Gayfer, Deputy Operations Director at Bristol Waste Company, said: "Every black wheelie bin full of waste costs the city money, whereas recycling in the right container can be sold, generating revenue. This helps ease demand on public funds and supports other key services, all whilst protecting the environment. It seems like a simple thing to do, but the benefits of recycling are incredible. It's such an easy win to put materials into the right recycling container."

He continued: "If Bristol residents are confused about which material goes in which recycling container, check Bristol Waste's website, where it shows how to sort materials and what happens to Bristol's recycling."

"At Bristol Waste, we ensure waste is disposed of responsibly and recycling is sent on to become new products. We aim to keep resources within the UK where we can."

Analysis carried out at the end of 2024 shows that the percentage of recyclable food waste in the wrong bin has gone up from around 25% to 31%.

When recycled in the brown food waste bin, Bristol's food waste like peelings, leftovers and out-of-date food, is taken to be recycled into biogas, which powers thousands of local homes, and is also turned into soil improver, helping to grow crops.

However, when food waste gets chucked in the black wheelie bin it creates harmful methane as it rots and costs the city huge amounts in disposal fees.

Bristol's general waste bins have also seen an increase in the amount of "dry recyclables" being thrown away. Dry recyclables refers to easily recyclable items that aren't food or garden waste. The amount of valuable resources like plastic, glass, card, paper and electricals in the wrong bin in Bristol has increased from 15% to 22%. Costing the city and the environment in the process.

Councillor Martin Fodor, Chair of Bristol City Council's Environment and Sustainability Committee, said: "We're grateful for the effort residents already put into correctly sorting their recycling, but these latest figures show we must do more to ensure our waste and recycling end up in the right kerb-side container."

"Correctly sorting more of your recyclable materials to increase the amount we recycle reduces our environmental impact. If we can cut the amount of general waste we send to landfill or burn to create electricity or heat, we can reduce the amount of harmful greenhouse gases we're releasing that are causing global temperatures to increase."

Councillor Fodor added: "When recyclable materials end up in our wheelie bins, rather than our kerbside recycling containers, this not only costs our city more to dispose of but also means we're missing out on earning important money that we could be reinvesting into our recycling service and helping to reduce costs to the taxpayer."

Sarah Burns, Sustainability and Engagement Manager for Bristol Waste Company, said "This waste composition analysis is where we get our understanding of recycling habits across the city. Helping us identify areas where we might need to up our efforts, informing our campaigns and allowing us to adapt our service to best serve an ever-changing city."

She continued: "This latest analysis has made one thing clear; we need to recycle more. Action is needed to do more for Bristol and the planet by reducing our environmental impact and to earn the city money from recyclables. We need to get valuable resources out of the city's general waste bins and into the recycling containers! Make sure you're using the kerbside recycling containers, the household reuse and recycling centres and utilising recycling schemes with local businesses and supermarkets."

- Please go to www.bristolwastecompany.co.uk/household/get-it-sorted/ for information on what recycling goes in which container.

Ends

Notes to editors

Items that could have been recycled in Bristol's kerbside containers now make up more than half (53%) of Bristol's average household wheelie bins, Bristol Waste Company's waste composition analysis has revealed.

Bristol Waste Company regularly carries out work to analyse the city's bins and recycling containers. This 'waste composition analysis' involves around 500 random, anonymous, households across the city having their waste and recycling taken away, sorted and analysed by an external company.

Waste composition 2024 fact-file

The percentage of recyclable materials in the black wheelie bin has gone up to 53% (from 44% in 2023)

- 19% is 'dry recycling' (paper, glass, plastic, metal etc)
- 31% is food waste
- 2% is garden waste

This research showed that the average black wheelie bin in the city is collected when it is 74% full.

Across all bins and containers the amount of food waste has increased compared to 2023.

The amount of food in the brown bin has not changed compared to 2023. The additional food waste is going into the black general waste bin.

Of all food was generated in homes:

- 45.5% is going in brown food waste recycling bins and is taken to be recycled
- 54.5% is going in the black, general waste wheelie bin

- We see more 'avoidable' food waste (e.g. unopened salad bags, uneaten leftovers, food that has gone off) going into the black general waste bin. The brown food waste recycling bins have more 'avoidable' food waste (peelings, eggshells, teabags)
- Research shows the reasons why residents are not recycling include not having a food recycling bin, and not knowing what happens to food waste after collection

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About Bristol Waste Company

At Bristol Waste we take care of the city, keeping it clean and safe for our residents and customers. We visit every home, clean every street, look after schools, civic buildings and commercial buildings – every day we strive to make people's lives cleaner, safer, and better.

You will see us collecting the waste and recycling, cleaning the streets, running the recycling centres, removing graffiti, cleaning buildings, providing security services and much more. We even grit the roads in the winter and clear fly-tips.

Serving the needs of the residents and businesses of Bristol, on behalf of Bristol City Council, is at the heart of what we do. Some only see us as a waste and facilities management business, but we see things differently; our role is to improve the lives of those who live, work, or visit Bristol and to protect the environment.

Our work is shaped and inspired by four values: we work together, we do what's right, we communicate, and we perform. These values form the basis of all the work we do for the city of Bristol and beyond.