



Science Café At-Bristol 20th January 2010

Waste not want not

Post-event resources

At-Bristol were very pleased to welcome James Sessions-Hodge from Ethos Energy, Sean Spencer-Wort from Bristol City Council and Katie Winterborne and Hannah Johnson from Resource Futures to discuss the future of waste.

The evening began with a discussion focused around items of rubbish brought by visitors and drawn as a fetid lucky dip from a black bin liner. Experiences were shared about the different types of waste, and the obstacles encountered when dealing with them. During this time visitors were encouraged to note down motivations and de-motivations apparent in the behaviours being described.

Each of the speakers then spoke briefly to introduce their work and share their thoughts on waste. During these introductions visitors were encouraged to write down future opportunities and concerns relating to the themes introduced. Graphics from the speakers' presentations are attached below.

Then followed a short break where visitors were encouraged to discuss the motivating factors and the opportunities and concerns they had noted down and identify those which were shared.

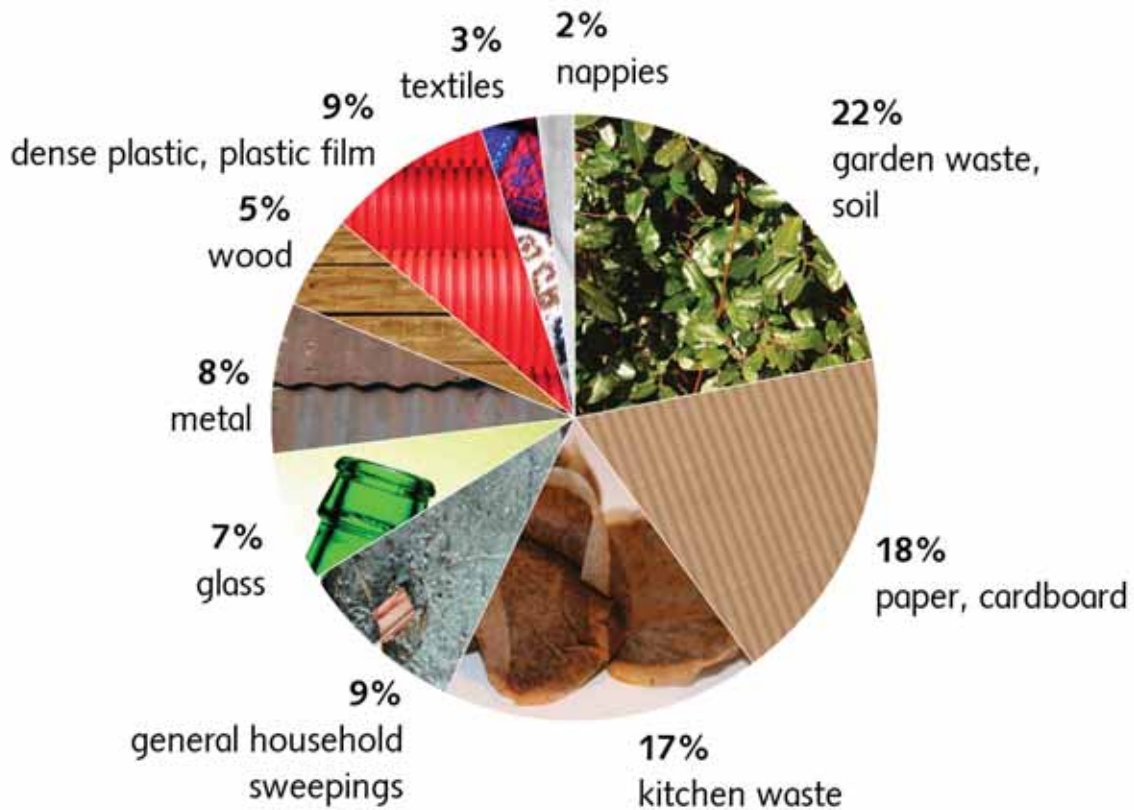
Finally, we discussed as a group these shared ideas.

Below is a copy of the shared ideas, as well as those written down individually by visitors and left for us to record at the end.

Further information about science cafés in Bristol can be found at sciencecafe.co.uk

Further information about At-Bristol and our events is available at at-bristol.org.uk

Household Waste Composition in % (MRW, 2005)



Ethos Energy's Avonmouth plant – currently processing 2000 tonnes pa of clinical waste but would process 8000 tonnes pa municipal solid waste (MSW) due to its higher calorific value. Compare the height of the chimney (centre right) with that of a traditional incinerator.

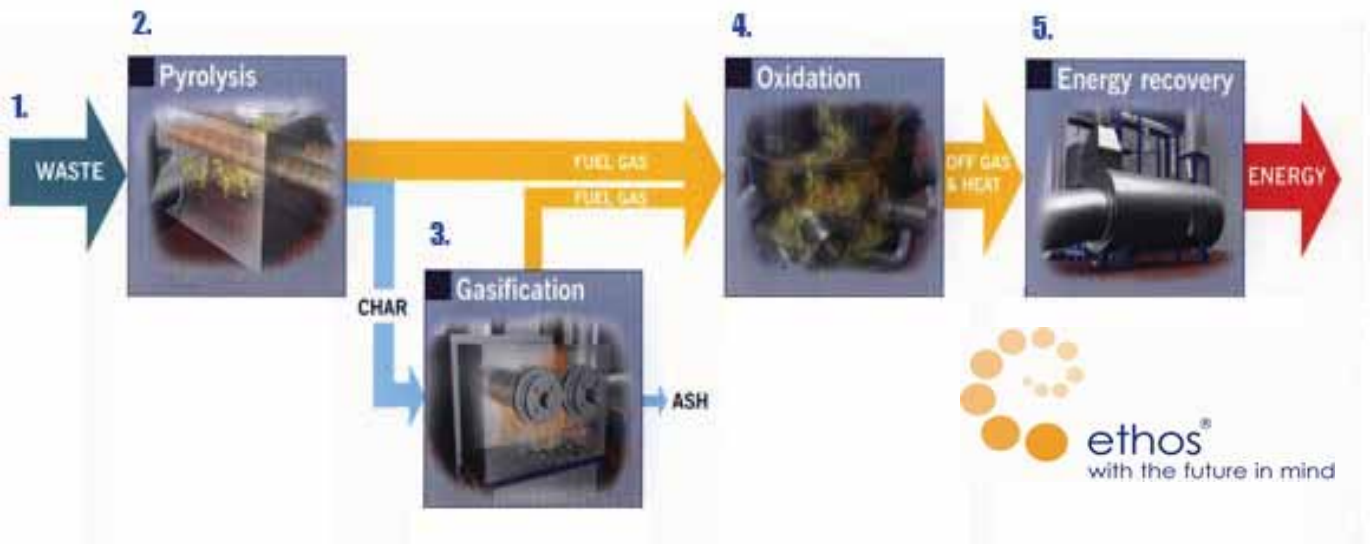


Diagram of Ethos Energy's advanced thermal treatment process



Ethos Energy's ST150, one of four being built for Queen Elizabeth aircraft carriers

Visitor opinion collected during the event

The following opinions came up during general discussion at the end of the event:

Shared motivations and demotivations

- Duty to 'do my part'
- Litter is a sign of an unhealthy community approach to waste. We accept it.
- There are other important social issues which compete with waste for time investment
- Tax/deposit on packaging
- Pay people to recycle
- Saving money
- Reduction in CO₂/global warming
- To be seen to be green
- There is a lot of media coverage of waste issues
- It is made too easy for us to generate unnecessary waste
- Carrier bags are becoming socially unacceptable
- There are too many 'eco-shopper' bags available – they become disposable as well
- Research shows that the rise in the number of eco-shopping bags available has levelled off
- Necessary substantial change in way of life
- Little things are starting us on a cycle of being alert
- Energy context won't be the same forever – energy may become cheaper
- "I don't make a difference"
- "Bristol is a tipping point (ho ho!) – we're working with waste as well as anywhere else"

Shared Opportunities and Concerns

- Plastic carrier bags
 - There are "bigger fish to fry" than plastic carrier bags
 - 6000 plastic bags are equivalent to one tank of petrol... but plastic bags are often found in the stomachs of dead animals
 - Plastic bags can be re-used
- Awareness of the value of wood as a renewable energy source
 - Why don't we use the wood that we burn on Guy Fawkes night to generate energy instead?
 - Sales of woodburners are up
- "Fines for wastes encourage fly tipping."
 - It was expected that fly tipping would become an increasing problem when fortnightly general waste collections were introduced but this wasn't observed
 - Barnet case study shows that this indeed isn't true
 - Extensive education is necessary

- Lessons learnt from some local authorities may not translate to others – e.g. rural challenges are different to urban challenges
- Some materials (e.g. high grade glass) are difficult to recycle. Recyclable materials can be contaminated if the wrong thing goes into the process.
- If you leave packaging at the supermarket you transfer the responsibility to them. But will they just landfill it?
- Should be more focus on front end – manufacturers – how much waste is produced
- We're all semi-converted in different ways
- Waste street collections
 - Some people believe the council don't do what they say they do – waste gets mixed together anyway and it's not recycled
 - Street collectors are too pedantic – if it's not in the right box, it's not collected
 - People should notify to the council if they believe there is a problem with their waste collections
- Some people drag heels about recycling. Battles still to be won.
- People come up with reasons not to recycle because they can't be bothered
- Fashion and longevity: it is the responsibility of manufacturers to ensure products are made to last and of individuals to ensure they are used for their useable lifetime
- Disability and accessibility of service
 - Important to ensure services are accessible to people with varying needs
- Central government targets
 - If the city meets them, do we get a thank you present?
 - No
- Technologies will become cheaper

The following are individual opinions written down by visitors during the first part of the evening:

Individual motivations

- Social responsibility
- Saving money
- Reducing CO₂
- Not wanting the beauty of nature to be ruined
- Concern for the environment
- Worrying about toxins going into groundwater after landfill
- Makes us think about the way we live. This helps self-awareness.
- Some things are easy to re-use
- Ease of disposal at Homebase
- See a definite cost saving through council tax
- Increased taxation
- European tax increases
- Green
- Do your bit

- Fill your compost bin and grow your own

Individual de-motivations

- Black box doesn't accept certain materials
- Need to remember to take plastic bags with you
- Newspaper articles – waste goes to Africa and China rather than being recycled
- Garden waste
- Not knowing where the recycling goes and what it gets used for
- Rumours that it all ends up in landfill anyway
- Cost of repair is greater than cost of new
- Can't be bothered to put their rubbish anywhere else
- Money
- Time
- Hassle
- Mess
- People often see plastic waste as the problem/fault of the supermarket
- People often feel their own efforts don't actually make a difference, but it all adds up
- Sharing of green bins between neighbours
- Share cost of bin and increase/encourage use
- Obstacles – long journey to recycling centre
- Space to store waste before recycling (i.e. need more than one bin in the house)

Individual opportunities

- Green bins to share between houses
- More jobs: a whole industry to deal with outputs
- Technologies that make better and more useful by-products – new resources from waste treatments
- Awarding good recyclers
- Tackle the enormous overuse of packaging
- Tackle commercial waste
- Challenges for very low income households
- Abandoned vehicles

Individual concerns

- Fines for people dumping waste
- Advanced thermal treatment: Sulphur Dioxide gas – how long before an improvement on sulphur dioxide emissions?
- Cost to council tax of waste disposal
- Does not encourage us to reduce waste we create if we think good waste management solutions have been found.
- Where will we put it all? Small island, growing population, mixed culture, different cultural approaches to waste &c.
- Will it be possible for no waste to be produced either because of reuse or recycling