

## PRESS RELEASE

10 August 2023

For immediate release

### WATCHDOGS SLAM UK AS “IRRESPONSIBLE AND UNAMBITIOUS” ON WASTE

In a forceful response to the Government’s failure to implement a 10-point [action plan](#) submitted to Prime Minister Rishi Sunak in April 2023, a nationwide coalition of environmental and health watchdogs is accusing the Government of putting forward “specious excuses” for inaction when it should be phasing out waste incineration and maximizing recycling to cut down on emissions.

In a detailed letter published today, the coalition—which includes Black Lives Matter, Medact, Plastics Rebellion, the UK Without Incineration Network (UKWIN), XR Zero Waste, and Zero Waste Europe, as well as more than a dozen anti-incinerator groups around the UK—is urging the Government to provide “convincing reasons” for failing to implement the action plan.

Shlomo Downen, National Coordinator of UKWIN, said: “We look forward to hearing the detail of how the Government plans to ensure swift, decisive action on each of these 10 points to deliver a transition to a genuinely circular economy. Given the net zero imperative and a host of other pressing concerns, including air pollution and social justice, Government inaction is simply unacceptable.”

In its letter, the coalition emphasises that the action plan echoes the Climate Change Committee’s June 2023 call for a moratorium on new waste incineration capacity.

Downen of UKWIN noted that “allowing any more English incineration capacity to be operated—even that which has planning permission—would exacerbate incineration overcapacity at the local, regional, and national levels”. He added: “When it comes to recycling, England is falling behind Wales and Scotland. A ban on new planning permissions and new permits for waste incinerators in England is needed immediately. Such a ban is already in place in both Wales and Scotland.”

The action plan also demands that the Government urgently completes and publishes a long-overdue analysis on treatment capacity for residual (genuinely non-recyclable) waste. Defra Under-Secretary Rebecca Pow previously stated that the study was being prepared by the consultancy Resource and Waste Solutions Partnership and that it would be published in 2021—two years ago.

Downen stated: “The analysis must factor in the Government targets for reducing municipal residual waste by 29% by 2027 and reducing all residual waste by 50% by 2042. Otherwise, the incineration industry will continue to expand its high-carbon waste management approach, which would push Government targets even further out of reach.”

Another point in the action plan relates to halting the incineration and export of waste plastic through a radical reduction of plastic at source. The coalition stresses that the Government’s current strategy for addressing the plastics crisis is “wholly inadequate, lacking the leadership and ambition required to turn off the plastics tap and minimise plastic pollution”.

Pow responded to the action plan on behalf of the Government. The coalition characterises Pow’s letter as “suspiciously quiet” on “extreme” market distortions that render waste incineration cheaper than it ought to be. The group argues that Government “interference with the free market perversely encourages more incineration” at the expense of recycling. It further states that both incineration and the extraction of raw materials are “effectively subsidised”—while society pays the price.

Moreover, the coalition describes as “deeply worrying” Defra’s unwillingness to address the fact that an increasing number of incinerators are disproportionately being built in low-income areas with high proportions of Black and Brown communities.

With respect to air pollution, the action plan proposes enhanced commitments to monitoring and reducing incineration pollutants, including through unannounced inspections, more frequent monitoring of dioxins, stricter emissions limits, and more funding for enforcement. Noting that “everyone deserves clean air”, the plan stresses that “these steps are required given that incinerators are imposed on communities against their will, harming their air quality without their consent”.

The plan also calls on the Government to: develop a national incineration exit strategy, address local council “lock-in” into long-term incineration contracts, bring forward the inclusion of incineration under the UK Emissions Trading Scheme, introduce an incineration tax to lessen “significant unpaid costs to society”, and introduce mandatory audits of incinerator feedstock to establish and make public how much of the material being sent to incineration could have been recycled or composted.

– ### –

Relevant links:

- The 10-point action plan submitted by the Coalition in April 2023: <https://ukwin.org.uk/files/pdf/UKWIN-XRZW-10-point-action-plan-April-2023.pdf>
- Minister Pow’s June 2023 response to the 10-point action plan: <https://ukwin.org.uk/files/pdf/Defra-Pow-response-to-10-point-action-plan-June-2023.pdf>
- The coalition’s August 2023 reply to Minister Pow’s letter: <https://ukwin.org.uk/files/pdf/Coalition-response-to-Defra-on-10-point-action-plan-August-2023.pdf>

Contact: Shlomo Downen, National Coordinator of UKWIN, [coordinator@ukwin.org.uk](mailto:coordinator@ukwin.org.uk)