

Incineration Overcapacity in England

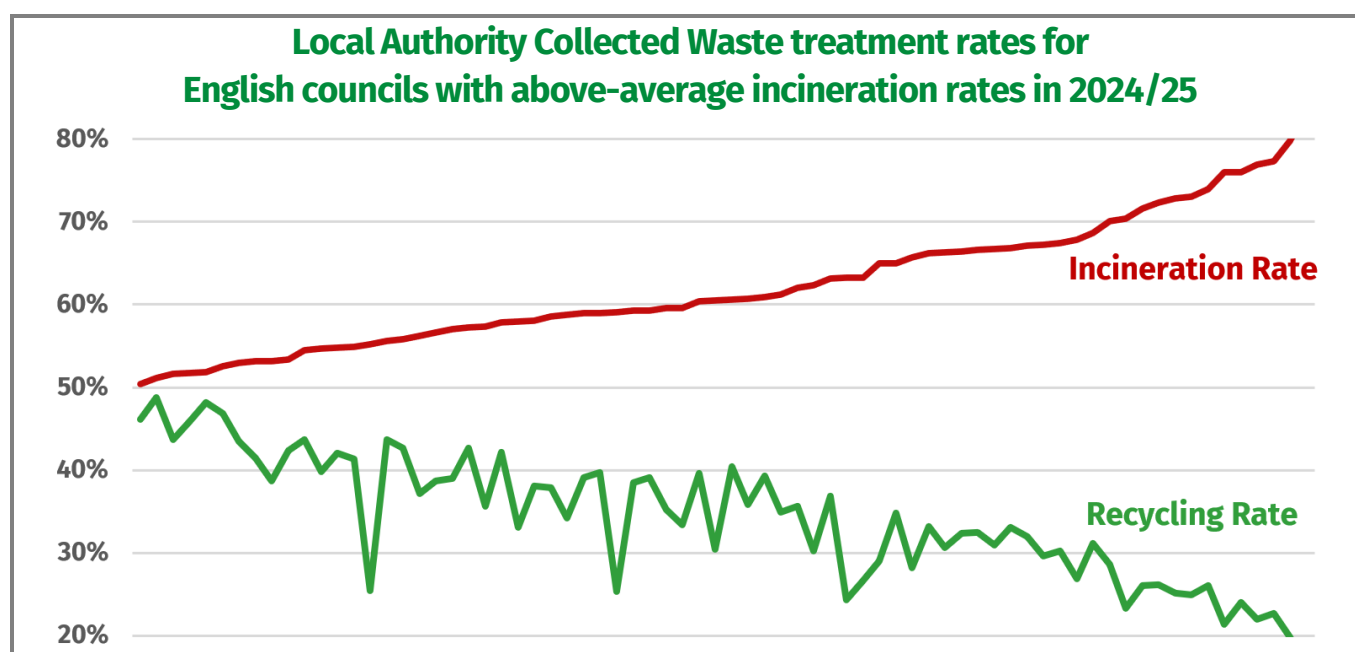
The Big Plastic Count 2026 revealed that across the UK 59% of our plastic waste is incinerated. Every tonne of plastic burned releases more than two tonnes of fossil CO₂.

Plastic production and incineration need to be curbed to meet climate ambitions.

To support recycling and the low carbon circular economy, the UK Government needs to stop the construction of new incinerators and instead pursue an incineration exit strategy.

INCINERATION COMPETES WITH RECYCLING

The following graph, based on official Defra statistics, shows how for councils with above-average rates of incineration there is a clear correlation between higher rates of incineration and lower recycling rates:



Of the 31 councils that delayed their introduction of separate food waste collections, some until the 2030s or 2040s, most cited their Energy from Waste contract for incineration as a barrier to improving their rates of recycling and composting. The greater the level of incineration overcapacity, the harder it will be for councils to renegotiate these contracts.

The Government has a target for England to achieve 65% recycling of municipal solid waste by 2035 with no more than 10% sent to landfill, reflecting how not all waste is combustible. This means that the Government's 65% recycling target implies that incineration rates should be no higher than a maximum of around 25%.

In 2024/25 more than 50% of England's local authority collected waste was incinerated. As such, rates of incineration will need to roughly halve if recycling targets are to be met. Despite this, more incineration capacity is currently in the pipeline.

The solution is to stop new incinerators, progressively close existing plants, and make better use of operational capacity, e.g. by limiting feedstock to only genuinely residual material.

EXISTING ENGLISH INCINERATION CAPACITY

There are 53 operational incinerators in England with a combined capacity of 15.8 Mtpa, and a further 10 plants under construction adding a further 4.6 Mtpa of capacity. Taken together there is estimated to be around **20.4 million tonnes of existing incineration capacity**.

Additionally, there are 24 incinerators considered to be in ‘active development’, with a combined capacity of 5.9 million tonnes. These figures do not include any of the more than 5 million tonnes of incineration capacity for projects that appear to have stalled.

INCINERATION OVERCAPACITY ACROSS ENGLAND

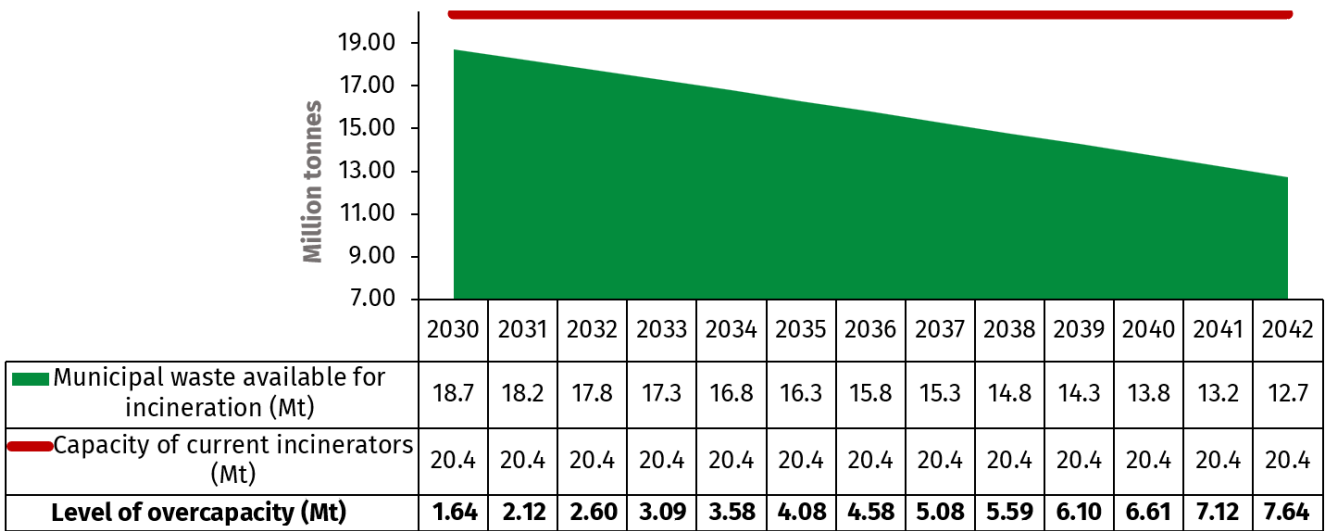
A legally binding commitment to halve the amount of England’s residual waste sent to incineration or landfill by 2042 came into force on 30 January 2023 under regulations pursuant to the Environment Act 2021. An interim municipal residual waste target for 2030 was adopted in December 2025 as part of the Residual Waste Reduction Target Delivery Plan.

Note: The term ‘municipal waste’ refers to household waste and similar wastes, including both council-collected and privately collected business waste.

As shown below, if current waste reduction and recycling targets are met, even if not a single new incinerator is built, English incineration overcapacity will worsen as time goes on, with **incineration overcapacity exceeding 7.6 million tonnes by 2042**.

The level of overcapacity would be even higher if account were taken of RDF export and/or of making use of some of the waste as feedstock for ‘sustainable aviation fuel’ (SAF).

Current English waste incineration capacity compared to waste forecast to be available if England's residual waste targets are met



Note: The graph and data table assume that 90% of residual municipal waste is available for use as incinerator feedstock because some waste is not combustible and some is used to heat cement kilns. They also assume 90% availability of existing incineration capacity, and a linear fall between the 2030 and 2042 targets based on a consistent municipal-to-total-waste ratio. Inclusion of other waste types would not change the conclusions, as most is unsuitable and/or has alternative treatment options.



For more information about waste incineration, including reasons to oppose incineration, a map and table of existing and proposed incinerators, and some facts, figures, and quotes – please visit the website at <https://ukwin.org.uk>