

OPINION



Expand your influence in the construction arena

Chindarat Taylor
director, Pathway to Zero Waste

■ **SOUTH COAST-BASED L&S WASTE MANAGEMENT RECENTLY OPENED A** construction materials recycling facility in Southampton, thanks to a £200,000 capital grant from the Waste & Resources Action Programme, one of our Pathway To Zero Waste partners. It is now successfully recycling 50,000 tonnes of construction and demolition (C&D) waste each year, material that would otherwise have gone to landfill. And more than 30 jobs have been created.

C&D waste offers a massive opportunity for companies such as L&S, particularly in south England where, despite the credit crunch, construction activity progresses at a feverish pace. From my desk, I can look out at Reading railway station, where Network Rail is soon to start work on an £800m upgrade. The area surrounding the station will be transformed by a separate £500m development. That's almost £1.5bn-worth of construction activity due to be carried in an area of less than one square kilometre.

Work on this scale is not being carried out everywhere, of course, but the picture across

the south-east is still encouraging. The top 100 projects by value in the UK equal a total investment of £11.5bn during the next three years. The value of all those projects is much higher – possibly as much as £60bn in the same period.

The downside of all this activity is the amount of waste that could end up in the region's landfill sites as a result. The south-east performs poorly compared with other regions when it comes to diverting C&D waste from landfill, with only 36% being reused, recycled or converted to energy. This is 14% below the national average. The rest goes to landfill, where it makes up 40% of total deposits, more than any other industrial or commercial sector.

This presents a massive growth opportunity for recycling and waste management companies, which can play an increasingly influential role in helping construction contractors and their clients to raise their environmental game.

By getting involved further up the

construction supply chain and working with pre-build teams – demolition contractors, architects, structural engineers, for example – to provide expert guidance on the steps that can be taken to minimise waste, reuse and recycle materials, they can ensure that as little material as possible is totally wasted by being buried in the ground.

Where this has already happened it has been a real driver of innovation, and has led to impressive 80-90% landfill diversion being achieved.

This idea of 'early contractor involvement' may be unusual in the waste and recycling industries at present, with only a relatively small number of companies actively pushing the approach. But those companies ready to respond to the demand – which may require a move outside the comfort zone of their traditional business model – will undoubtedly gain competitive advantage and market share as a result. Those that are slow to follow suit will find themselves increasingly marginalised as total resource efficiency becomes standard practice. Which it undoubtedly will. ■

THE IDEA OF 'EARLY CONTRACTOR INVOLVEMENT' MAY BE UNUSUAL IN THE RECYCLING INDUSTRY

Paul Sanderson, MRW editor, says:

"It will be interesting to see whether the recession is leading to more focus on minimising waste by construction contractors. When good times return, this massive part of the waste stream shouldn't get back into bad habits."

What are your views? Do you agree with Chindarat? Email your quote to: mrw@emap.com