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First step to zero-waste South East starts with construction industry

Peta Hodge
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A series of events to help organisations in the South East improve their resource efficiency and reduce waste – with the ultimate aim of creating a zero-waste region – kicks off with a workshop for the construction industry in Reading next week.

It will be the first event organised by Pathway to Zero Waste (PTZW), a partnership founded last month by SEEDA (South East England Development Agency), the Environment Agency and WRAP (Waste & Resources Action Programme), which says it will help businesses in the region save some £370 million in operating costs by 2011 – by redirecting waste from landfill towards recycling and reuse.

PTZW's starting-point is that the South East's reliance on landfill is unsustainable and that capacity will run out within five years. Its objective is to "deliver a cultural shift" and "transform the way that organisations view and manage materials, driving change from waste to resource."

It may be that PTZW is pushing at an open door – at its launch event last month, it says feedback cards showed 100 per cent support for its objectives from the 120 chief executives and other decision-makers who attended the event.

It certainly has some big-hitting support – as well as its three founder partners, its other partners include Defra (the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs), Improvement and Efficiency South East, the South East Centre for the Built Environment, the Government Office for the South East, the National Industrial Symbiosis Programme, and EnviroBusiness.

PTZW says this quality of backing gives it "a unique advantage, enabling the partners' collective experience, resources, skills and influence to be harnessed and used as a powerful catalyst for change."

PTZW will work to create a viable market for recovered and recycled materials within the South East, building up demand and ensuring there are enough facilities on the ground to meet it.


Chindarat Taylor, director of PTZW said: "The comprehensive network of recovery and recycling infrastructure needed to support smarter resource use – which PTZW will help establish – presents real commercial opportunities for companies that can operate in this area and will create thousands of new jobs, providing further economic benefits and helping to deliver long-term sustainable prosperity."

PTZW's short-term strategy is to concentrate on delivering what it describes as "high-impact quick wins" that accelerate the pace of change throughout the region. To this end it is focusing its efforts on three main areas of waste: construction and demolition (C&D), food and wood.

Specific targets for food and wood have yet to be set, but the targets for C&D waste are to achieve a 50 per cent reduction on 2008 levels by 2011 and a 90 per cent reduction by 2020 – ultimately paving the way for a zero-waste region, PTZW says.

As a first step towards this, next week's workshop is aimed at organisations involved in every stage of the build process, including architects and designers, construction contractors, waste management companies and local authorities.

As well as outlining PTZW's strategy for change, the workshop will include the initial findings from two specially-commissioned projects, looking at the three year forecast for construction materials in the region (demand, potential waste volumes and recycling infrastructure hotspots) and potential market mechanisms for trading in reusable waste materials.



South East programme Pathway to Zero Waste is targeting the construction industry

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