



Keep Wales Tidy Position on Biodegradable and Compostable Materials 2018



cadwch keep
gymru'n wales
daclus tidy

Given the plastic free momentum in recent months, there has been a significant increase in queries in regard to plastic use and potential alternatives. There is a risk however, that this current surge of interest may lead to unintended consequences where plastics are replaced with potentially harmful materials which are not currently regulated and / or appropriate to our current waste infrastructure.

There is a lack of regulation covering what 'biodegradable' means. Most currently available plastics labelled as biodegradable generally degrade under specific conditions which may not always be easy to find in the natural environment and can thus still cause harm to ecosystems. Biodegradation in the marine environment is particularly challenging.

The Glastonbury Festival trialled this (biodegradable) approach, stipulating that only biodegradable plastics could be used on site; but this proved sufficiently problematic that the festival now bans biodegradables and is focusing on plastic prevention.

Similarly, items which are labelled 'compostable' are not always suitable for home composting and require separate waste management. Materials which consist of (sustainably sourced) plant fibres or are labelled as suitable for food waste / compost would be exceptions to this but are not currently widely available.

Therefore, many labelled biodegradable / compostable materials are more appropriate for events, festivals or other 'closed' areas where they can be collected through an appropriate waste contractor, but the issues are far from resolved if these 'alternatives' are to become more widespread.

- Keep Wales Tidy does not believe that biodegradables are the solution to going 'plastic free'. They are, after all, still SINGLE-USE
- Keep Wales Tidy strongly supports efforts towards the circular economy and increased recycling infrastructure in Wales with a primary focus on prevention and reduction.
- Keep Wales Tidy strongly supports the introduction of robust regulation in regard to biodegradable / compostable materials and subsequent waste infrastructure, requiring such materials to have no environmental impact.
- Keep Wales Tidy strongly supports enforcement of consumer information regulations on all products detailing the source and end use of materials.
- There is some evidence that if people perceive items to be 'harmless' that it can lead to more littering. This will have to be monitored closely if the biodegradable industry continues to expand.

- Keep Wales Tidy strongly supports increased research and development efforts into alternative materials which are truly biodegradable / compostable, particularly for food waste. However, these advances will have to be considered very carefully if renewable resources are used due to the issues surrounding the use of bio-crops on a mass scale.
- Current waste infrastructure in Wales and the UK can support the most common forms of plastic recycling. Keep Wales Tidy therefore urges that where plastic use is deemed necessary, that every effort is made to ensure that the plastic sourced is 1) 100% recyclable AND/OR 2) 100% recycled (i.e. that it has a 100% recycled content). This will not only ensure that secondary markets are supported but will also reduce the need for virgin materials to be created.

For more information, please contact our Policy and Research Team at leq@keepwalestidy.cymru



cadwch keep
gymru'n wales
daclus tidy

33-35 Heol yr Eglwys Gadeiriol, Caerdydd, CF11 9HB | 33-35 Cathedral Rd, Cardiff, CF11 9HB

☎ 029 2025 6767 🌐 keepwalestidy.cymru ✉ info@keepwalestidy.cymru

Cadwch Gymru'n Daclus yn gwmni wedi ei gyfyngu trwy warant. Rhif Cwmni: 4011164 Rhif Elusen: 1082058 Rhif TAW: 850 3958 13
Keep Wales Tidy is a Company Limited by Guarantee. Company Registration Number: 4011164 Charity Registration Number: 1082058 VAT Registration Number: 850 3958 13

