

Local Government Association

war on **waste** - summary

food packaging study: wave 3



'War on Waste' Food Packaging Study: Wave 3 Summary

Background

Each year the UK generates about 25 million tonnes of waste from households¹, a large proportion of which ends up in landfill. Britain dumps more household waste into landfill than nearly all other countries in the European Union (around two-thirds of its municipal waste goes to landfill; only Portugal and Greece put more there²). The objective of this research is to inform the Local Government Association's 'War on Waste' campaign, which seeks to address the amount of rubbish produced and the way in which it is thrown away.

This study monitored food packaging levels for a basket of 29 common food items that had been purchased from eight supermarkets. These were:

- ASDA
- Co-op
- Lidl
- Marks and Spencer
- Morrisons
- Sainsbury's
- Tesco
- Waitrose

Overall results

On average, 5% of the total weight of the shopping baskets was made up of packaging. The average weight of packaging in a basket was 727 grams, but this ranged from 645.5 grams for the Tesco basket to 802.5 grams for the Waitrose basket. Figure 1 shows the relative amounts of packaging for each retailer.

The retailers with the lowest packaging weight were Tesco (645.5 grams) Marks and Spencer (671 grams) and Asda (695 grams),

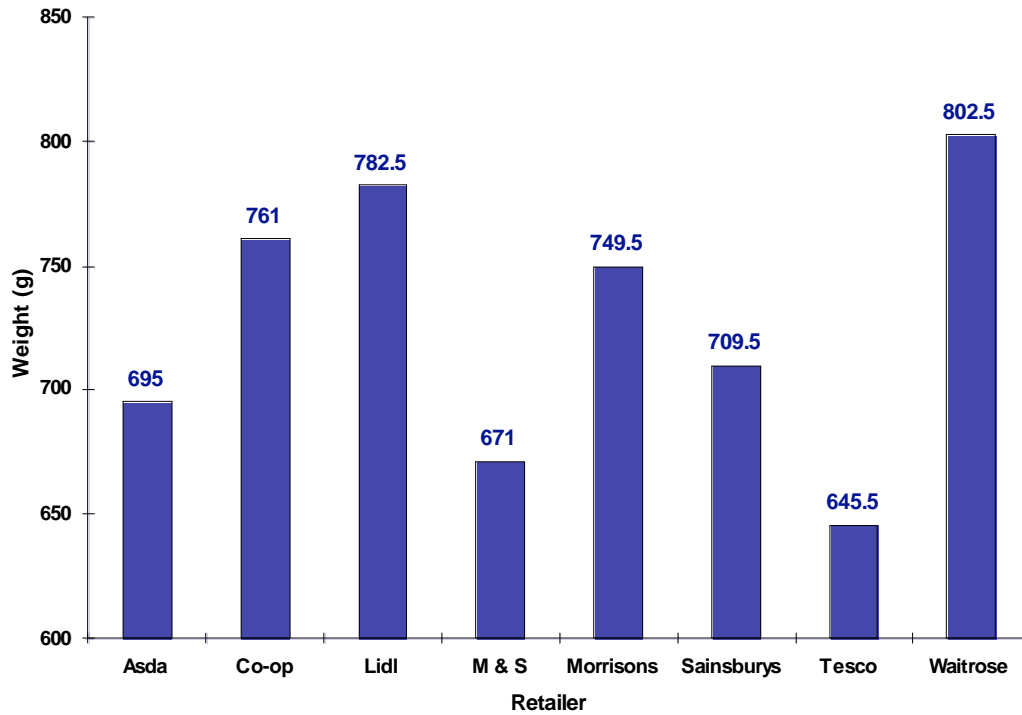
¹ 'Municipal Waste Management Statistics 2007/08, Statistical Release 452/08' from the Defra website on 11 February 2009,

www.defra.gov.uk/environment/statistics/wastats/bulletin08.htm

² 'Key Facts about Waste and Recycling: Municipal Waste Management in the European Union 2003' from Defra website on 11 February 2009,

www.defra.gov.uk/environment/statistics/waste/kf/wrkf08.htm

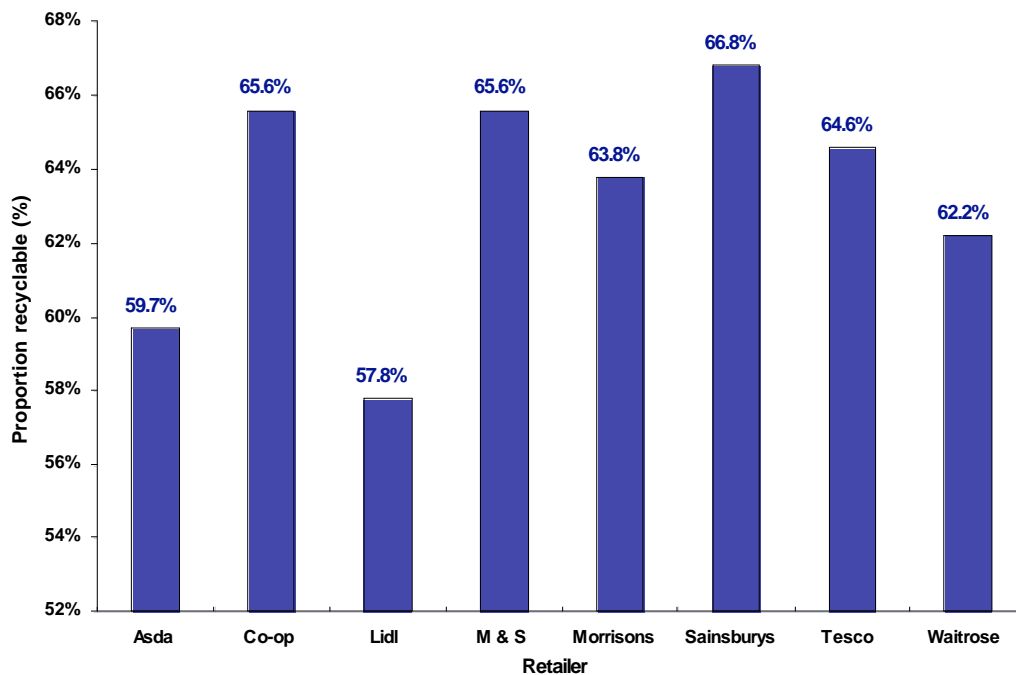
Figure 1: Weight of packaging for the basket of 29 food items, by retailer



The proportion of waste packaging that was recyclable ranged from 57.8% in Lidl's basket to 66.8% in the basket from Sainsbury's. Figure 2 shows the relative proportions of recyclable packaging for each retailer.

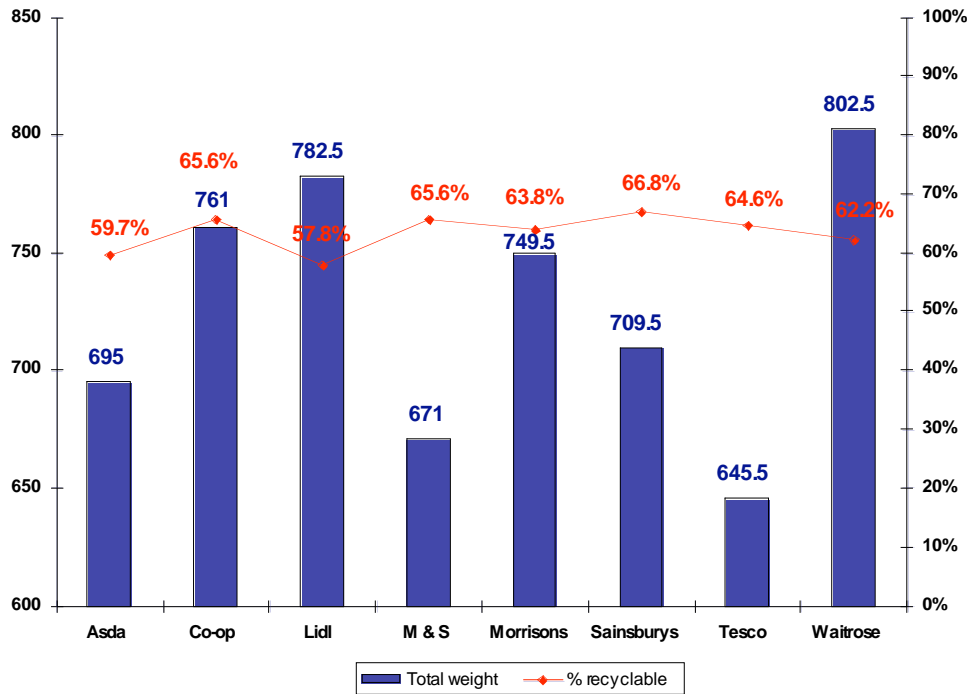
The retailers with the highest proportion of recyclable packaging were Sainsbury's (66.8%), the Co-op (65.6%) and Marks and Spencer (65.6%).

Figure 2: Proportion of packaging that was recyclable, by retailer



Overall, the best performing retailers have low levels of packaging, but also a high proportion of recyclable waste. They were Tesco and Marks and Spencer (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Weight of packaging and proportion of packaging that was recyclable, by retailer



There has been a great improvement in labelling of products since the previous waves, with many items showing details about whether packaging is widely recyclable, recyclable in some areas where facilities exist, or not recyclable; and whether there is recycled content in the packaging.

- The Co-op provided the most information about what packaging was made from, with symbols on 16 of the 29 items.
- Marks and Spencer had most items labelled as having recycled content in their packaging; four of the 29 items were in wrapping labelled as being made from recycled materials.
- Marks and Spencer provided the most information about whether packaging was recyclable clearly stating this on 18 of the 29 items, although the Co-op used the mobius loop or recyclable steel symbol on 17 items.

Results from Lidl

Picture 5: Shopping basket from Lidl



- Lidl did not clearly state whether packaging was recyclable (in words) on any of the 28 items; but used the mobius loop on ten items.
- Seven items showed what the packaging was made from.
- Two items of the packaging were labelled as made from recycled materials.
- The total weight of packaging from Lidl was 782.5g. 452.5g was recyclable (57.83%) and 330g was rubbish.

Picture 6: Total packaging from Lidl



Results from Morrisons

Picture 9: Shopping basket from Morrisons



- Morrisons clearly stated whether packaging was recyclable (in words) on ten of the 29 items; and used the mobius loop on six items.
- Four items showed what the packaging was made from.
- None of the packaging was labelled as made from recycled materials.
- The total weight of packaging from Morrisons was 749.5g. 478.5g was recyclable (63.84%) and 271g was rubbish.

Picture 10: Total packaging from Morrisons



Results from Sainsbury's

Picture 11: Shopping basket from Sainsbury's



- Sainsbury's clearly stated whether packaging was recyclable (in words) on 12 of the 29 items; and used the mobius loop or recyclable steel symbol on thirteen items.
- 14 items showed what the packaging was made from.
- On two items the packaging was labelled as made from recycled materials.
- The total weight of packaging from Sainsbury's was 709.5g. 474g was recyclable (66.81%) and 235.5g was rubbish.

Picture 12: Total packaging from Sainsbury's



Results from Tesco

Picture 13: Shopping basket from Tesco



- Tesco clearly stated whether packaging was recyclable (in words) on three of the 29 items; and used the mobius loop on six items.
- Seven items showed what the packaging was made from.
- On two items the packaging was labelled as made from recycled materials.
- The total weight of packaging from Tesco was 645.5g. 417g was recyclable (64.6%) and 228.5g was rubbish.

Picture 14: Total packaging from Tesco



Conclusions from the research

The researchers drew the following conclusions:

At the third wave of the study the range of proportions of recyclable packaging ranged from 57.8% to 66.8%, so there remains scope for improvement across all retailers in terms of reducing the amount of rubbish that is thrown away.

It was noted that there has been a great improvement in labelling of products since the previous wave, with many retailers providing information about what packaging is made from and whether it is capable of being recycled.

- Seven of the ten fruit and vegetable items were available loose from Tesco although one of these had sticky labels to provide information about the product (avocados). Six items were available loose (some with sticky labels) from Morrisons, Marks and Spencer and Sainsbury's. Asda and the Co-op sold five items loose (although only nine of the ten items were available in the Co-op), and Lidl and Waitrose only three.
- Cherry tomatoes were sold in a plastic tray in five of the eight retailers, with the plastic labelled as "recyclable" at Asda, the Co-op and Waitrose and "check local recycling" at Morrisons. They were available completely loose in Tesco, in a plastic bag at Marks and Spencer and in compostable packaging from Sainsbury's. Grapes were pre-packaged in bags in six of the eight retailers but available loose from Morrisons and Marks and Spencer. The bag from Sainsbury's stated that it could be recycled if returned to a large Sainsbury's store.
- Mushrooms were available loose from five retailers, and in plastic trays from Lidl, Marks and Spencer and Waitrose. Peppers were loose in seven retailers, but packaged in plastic at Lidl. Strawberries were packaged in a plastic tray at all retailers.
- The meat and fish products were packaged in plastics, although the Co-op also used card labels on the packaging of the sausages and chicken breasts which was counted as recyclable. Most provided some information about what the packaging was made from or whether it was capable of being recycled.
- At all eight retailers milk was packaged in a plastic bottle, made from high-density polyethylene (HDPE (2)), although only Marks and Spencer and Tesco had labelled this packaging as widely recyclable. The sunflower spread was also packaged in a similar way (in plastic tubs) at all eight retailers, Marks and Spencer and Morrisons advised the consumer to "check local recycling."
- Stilton was shrink-wrapped at four retailers, sold in plastic trays at three retailers and wrapped in wax paper at Waitrose. The eggs were always available in a cardboard box but this was labelled as made from "100% recycled paper/board" at Marks and Spencer and Tesco and "95% recycled materials" from Sainsbury's.
- Pizza varied in its packaging from all plastics (at Asda, Lidl and Marks and Spencer), two pizzas in cardboard boxes alongside some plastic wrapping, two on cardboard bases with plastic wrapping, and one in plastic wrapping on a polystyrene base with a cardboard sleeve to provide nutritional information.

- Sugar was available in a plastic bag from three retailers, a paper bag from three retailers (widely recyclable), and waxed paper bags from two retailers (Marks and Spencer bag labelled “check local recycling”). Crisps were always packaged in plastic and foil lined bags, these were labelled as “not recyclable” from Marks and Spencer and Sainsbury’s and as “check local recycling” for the outer plastic bag at Morrisons.
- Cookies were packaged in a plastic packet at all retailers, labelled as ‘check local recycling’ by Morrisons. The packaging at Marks and Spencer additionally used a plastic tray which was made from “50% recycled plastic”. The cornflakes were packaged in a plastic bag in a cardboard box at all retailers but the cardboard box was made from “85% recycled board” at Sainsbury’s, “75% recycled board” at Tesco and “50% recycled paper” at Marks and Spencer. The plastic bag was labelled as “recyclable” at Waitrose, and “recyclable at large stores” at Sainsbury’s.
- The baked bean cans were labelled as “recyclable steel” from the Co-op, Marks and Spencer and Sainsbury’s, and labelled just as “widely recyclable” at Morrisons and Tesco. The can from Lidl was made from 40% recycled materials. Bread was packaged in a plastic bag at all retailers, and was labelled as “recyclable at large Sainsbury’s stores” and “check local recycling” at Morrisons and Marks and Spencer. Jam was always packaged in a glass jar, which in Marks and Spencer was stated as being made from 20% recycled glass. The lid was also labelled as “check local recycling” at Marks and Spencer, “recyclable” at Waitrose and as “recyclable steel” at Sainsbury’s. The jar from Lidl was made from 97% recycled glass.

While some retailers consistently provided information about whether packaging was recyclable, others only provided details on a few items. There is still a long way to go for some retailers to provide sufficient information for consumers about recycling and there is scope for improvement among all retailers in the amount of packaging made from recycled materials.

Annex 1: Methodology

The objective of this research was to inform the Local Government Association's 'War on Waste' campaign, which seeks to address the amount of rubbish produced and the way in which it is thrown away.

BMRB Social Research were commissioned to monitor food packaging levels in a shopping basket, in terms of amount of packaging and composition of that packaging (for example, whether the packaging is recyclable).

A range of common food items (29 items), representing a regular shopping basket were purchased from eight retailers (ASDA, Co-op, Lidl, Marks and Spencer, Morrisons, Sainsbury's, Tesco and Waitrose). These were purchased by four interviewers from across England (Birmingham, Surrey, Essex and Bury) and couriered to the research team overnight for analysis the following day. Analysis involved recording the total weight of the product and the total weight of the packaging. The component parts of the packaging were weighed separately to measure the proportion of packaging that was recyclable or rubbish. Photographs of the shopping baskets were taken before analysis and of the waste created

This is the third wave of this exercise, which will be repeated in order to record the trends in food packaging over time.



The Local Government Association is the national voice for more than 450 local authorities in England and Wales. The LGA group comprises the LGA and five partner organisations which work together to support, promote and improve local government.



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