

Changes to the handling of upholstered household seating at recycling sites

Summary

- **New regulations mean from January 2023 SWP recycling sites in Somerset (and across the UK) are handling 'upholstered household seating' differently.**
- **These items now have a dedicated skip at each recycling site.**
- **This is to reduce any risk posed to the environment by Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) found in some fire retardants used in soft furnishing.**
- **The only change for the public is the need to put these items into the new dedicated skip.**

What is changing?

As you may be aware, from 1 January 2023, the way upholstered household seating is handled at SWP's recycling sites has changed. This is a regulatory change due to the possible presence of Persistent Organic Pollutants (known as POPs – see below). Items affected include: sofas, sofa beds, armchairs, kitchen and dining room chairs, stools and foot stools, home office chairs, futons, bean bags, floor and sofa cushions.

All sites have a new dedicated skip, signed 'upholstered household seating' for items that could contain POPs. These items will be collected and processed separately. Items of household seating that are not upholstered, for example wooden chairs without cushions, should go into the relevant material skip as usual.

This means recycling sites now have three skips for non-recyclable items:

- Energy from Waste (EFW) – for anything that cannot be recycled (unless it is something that is larger than your kerbside bin or could contain POPs).
- Non-EFW Residual Waste – material too large for the EFW skip (anything larger than the size of a kerbside refuse bin), such as mattresses and large rolls of carpet. This material goes to landfill.
- Upholstered household seating.

The only change for the public is the need to put 'upholstered household seating' into the new dedicated skip. All three of the skips above are staffed to ensure the right materials are put in the right place. This new process will be kept under review and could change in the future. Further changes will be clearly identified and shared.

These items will still be collected on the bulky waste collection service and crews will transport and process them separately.

Why are things changing?

New regulations have come into force to limit any risk posed by the possible presence of POPs in the fire retardants historically applied to these items. Please note, POPs are not believed to be hazardous in the small quantities you might find in the home. The environmental risk comes when such items are compacted, damaged, or shredded through the onward treatment and disposal process. In these instances, organic pollutants that could damage the environment (by breaking down slowly and finding their way into the food chain) can be released and must now be controlled

The new arrangements are in line Environment Agency advice and guidance.

Messaging for the public

We have updated website information and will be publicising the change through the local and social media from early January.

The key messages below may help with any contact you get on this topic.

- Upholstered household seating now needs to go into a separate skip at recycling sites.
- That means things like sofas, armchairs, upholstered chairs and stools, futons, bean bags, floor and sofa cushions.
- The skip will be sign-posted and staffed to avoid any confusion.
- This change is due to new nationwide regulations about how everyone must handle items which could contain fire retardant Persistent Organic Pollutants.
- The quantities that could be present in the home are very small and not believed to be hazardous, it's when items are broken up for treatment and disposal that pollutants could be released that could impact the environment and that now must be controlled.

Somerset Waste Partnership