

Recycling, a potential 'new and emerging issue

Comments from a WATCH/COPI member on HSE's Horizon Scanning Unit's report

Perhaps need to define your scope in terms of recycling. From our perspective, it can cover reprocessing of products to composting to energy from waste plant. A huge variety of health and safety issues!

May be worth referring to overarching Waste Strategy and hierarchy of waste:
http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/waste/strategy/strategy_legislation.htm

I understand that HSE core business is occupational health and safety of workforce - but would be good if effect of work activities on others who may be affected could be mentioned. In our experience novel technologies cause concern amongst the public and their perception of the risk posed do not always tally with that of the experts. Recent planning applications that illustrate this locally have been for a waste resource recovery park near Ellesmere Port (can send a copy of our report on this if it's helpful), an in-vessel composting plant in Leyland and currently we are working on a proposal for an energy for waste plant at Ineos Chlor in Runcorn. All of these have organised opposition from the public and lobby groups who believe that these processes will harm their health. There is a good document on the Department of Health website which explains risk perception and environmental hazards.

www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_4006604

There is a very thorough report to DEFRA regarding environment and health impacts of disposal of municipal waste - that includes recycling. The report has collated evidence on emissions to air, land and water from a wide range of waste management operations, including those that can be classified as recycling. The gist of the report is that health effects from bioaerosols is likely to be low - it does acknowledge limitations in terms of available information.

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/waste/research/health/pdf/health-report.pdf>

Thoughts from our experience of health consultation for pollution control... fugitive emissions from installations are frequently ignored or not measured - may well be relevant to emissions from recycling plant; one third of all landfill application in the NW had their permit to operate refused - some of this was for contamination to water courses - but a not insignificant proportion was to the fact that the Environment Agency did not judge that a 'competent person' was responsible for the operation. A factor that may well carry over into the potentially lucrative recycling industry!

And finally - an anecdote - I can't find this written up anywhere - but was told, by an authoritative source that legionella has been found growing inside plastic bags of compost being sold to the public. I did find a Dutch study that mentioned this as a potential occupational health issue - but this was related to the consumer end of the chain

I appreciate that there's cross over between Environment Agency and HSE regulation of these things - but feel it important that they are raised at this time.