

East Renfrewshire: SEPA publish household waste stats

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By Gillian McPherson Reporter

An East Renfrewshire environmental activist has urged the council to step up its game after the publication of the latest figures on household waste management.

According to statisticians at the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA), the area recycled 56.6% of this waste last year, a rate only surpassed by Angus Council which recycled 57.9%.

This was, however, down from a table-topping rate of 67.8% achieved by East Renfrewshire in 2019, and in keeping with a downward trend nationally.

Scotland's overall household waste recycling percentage reduced from 44.9% in 2019 to 42% in 2020.

SEPA said it was likely "Covid-19 impacts" were the main driver behind this reduction. This reasoning was echoed by the council.

But Laura Young, known as Less Waste Laura online, said it was “sad to see” that recycling rates haven’t been as good as they were previously.

“I do really feel like Covid meant we didn’t prioritise it and the upsetting thing for me was that in the year leading up to COP26 when we were hosting the biggest environmental conference in the world, we weren’t even getting to grips with our own waste collection and recycling,” added the 25-year-old, who attended the climate change conference as a campaigner for international development charity Tearfund.

“That feels like a really small thing we should have been focusing on to be better and we just didn’t and it’s a shame.

“We definitely should be doing more. Education is one thing, keeping things regular is another and making sure people have the infrastructure they need.”

The amount of Scottish household waste landfilled in 2020 was just under 660,000 tonnes, a reduction of 98,000 tonnes (13%) from 2019, and a reduction of 794,000 tonnes (54.6%) from 2011.

This is the ninth consecutive decrease in household waste landfilled and SEPA says this drop is primarily due to greater diversions from landfill to incineration and in part less waste being generated.

But Laura, from Newton Mearns, also warns that when you incinerate or burn waste, “it is predominately plastic because most of what we buy nowadays comes in some sort of plastic”.

The problem with that she says is “its burning fossil fuels because that’s basically what it is, so we really need to be putting an emphasis not on just recycling but on reducing the amount of plastic we use anyway”.

In the area, 44,360 tonnes of household waste was generated in 2020, and while more than half of that was recycled, 32.4% was managed by “other diversion from landfill”, slightly more than the percentage for Scotland as a whole.

A further 11% was landfilled, significantly less than the national figure of 27.2%.

A spokeswoman for East Renfrewshire Council told the Barrhead News: “As we anticipated, the early weeks of the initial Covid-19 lockdown impacted services across the council including our household waste collections.

“While our recycling performance is down on previous years, we are pleased that we achieved the second highest rate in Scotland and are confident that for 2021 and beyond we will return to the excellent recycling levels we achieved pre-pandemic.”

Terry A’Hearn, chief executive of the SEPA, added: “Whilst it’s positive that for a ninth consecutive year we see a move from landfill, the latest data does reflect the realism of the public health emergency.

“What’s important is not the past, but what we do next. We’ve shown that by working together, we can rise to the challenge of a healthcare emergency.

We need now to show that we can do this again in tackling the climate crisis.”

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