

# Performance of the Waste Sector in Ireland

## Covid 19 Initial Restrictions (March – May 2020)

The restrictions introduced by Government to combat Covid 19 had a profound impact on the economy and public activities. Waste management services were designated as an essential service and arrangements were made to ensure the continuity of services.

Restrictions led to an increase in household waste produced while commercial and construction waste decreased significantly. Waste collection services continued as normal and public waste infrastructure remained operational. Waste processing at materials recycling facilities was maintained and waste recovery at waste to energy plants continued as normal. Waste recovery at Cement Kilns reduced and ultimately ceased while waste recovery at composting facilities continued with increases in food waste. Waste disposal at landfill was in line with expectations while the export of waste as fuel continued with strong demand.



Key decisions assisted the sector including the establishment of the High-Level Advisory Group for Waste, the designation of the Regional Waste Management Offices, RWMO's, as the sectoral lead and the establishment of the Local Authority Business Continuity Group. The RWMO's produced a risk based Monitoring and Early Warning System and issued weekly updates throughout the period. The cooperation of a wide range of key stakeholders including government and regulatory bodies, representative associations, industry operators and observers, ensured that the response of the sector was effective and efficient.

The sector proved to be remarkably resilient and the collective response was assisted using established structures and arrangements. The risk-based approach, rigorous monitoring and reporting and continuous capacity analysis provided an important reference framework for the sector.

The development and implementation of robust business continuity measures by the sector ensured that services were maintained while clear guidance was provided where required supported by national and regional awareness.

The events highlighted some vulnerabilities including the sensitivity of cement production as a waste recovery option, the coordination and integration of public waste infrastructure and the export of certain hazardous waste streams. The management of healthcare waste was highly responsive however the dependence on limited processing options could be an issue in future. The events also highlighted the potential for illegal activity notwithstanding the continuity and availability of waste services.

The state should build on the successes and actions identified including the reinforcement of existing structures, the development of risk-based approaches, and greater self-sufficiency particularly regarding hazardous waste. The state should continue to rigorously monitor the sector, improve the quality of data, embed business continuity measures and provide clear guidance.

The state may need to reconsider the total thermal capacity calculation in future waste plans while the completion of the Civic Amenity Site study by the RWMO's will address the coordination and integration of public waste infrastructure. The risks associated with the export of certain hazardous wastes must be evaluated while healthcare waste capacity will be included in future RWMO Quarterly Waste Capacity Reports. An increased focus on the enforcement of standardised waste presentation by laws is also required to reduce illegal activities and increase participation in authorised services.

The response of the waste sector in Ireland to the Covid 19 crisis in the initial phase of restrictions was robust, reliable and resilient. The strength of established structures, arrangements and relationships was evident throughout and ensured that waste as an essential service was maintained during the period.