

A Circular Economy for Leftover Paint

Introduction

PaintCare is an industry-led initiative, backed by local and national government, the waste industry, paint retailers, and other stakeholders to help solve the problem of leftover decorative paint. The British Coatings Federation (BCF) has identified an opportunity to create a national scheme for leftover paint in the UK, for it to be reused or remanufactured instead of being (illegally) landfilled or incinerated, creating a 'circular economy' model. The BCF has been working on the issue for several years, and has been in positive dialog with Defra on the issue during this period. However, BCF believes the Government could do more to help solve the problem, especially by helping stimulate a market for remanufactured paint by specifying its use in government painting contracts.

The Problem

55 million litres of leftover decorative paint is generated in the UK each year. When disposed, most of it finds its way into the domestic waste stream, goes into landfill via black bags, or in some cases gets separated out and incinerated as hazardous waste at considerable cost to local authorities as the public have limited means to dispose leftover paint. One of the main challenges, is that only **one in three Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs)** is accepting paint for reuse or remanufacture, making it challenging for the public to dispose leftover paint. An additional challenge in stimulating remanufacture and reuse is in creating a market for leftover paint to absorb the nearly **20 million litres** of leftover paint suitable for reuse and remanufacturing, which is much more cost effective than incineration.

Some progress has already been made, with the industry funding several paint remanufacturing pilots, and the BCF have set up a consumer-focused website www.paintcare.org.uk to promote buying the correct amount of paint in the first place, advising consumers how to use up existing paint and a postcode locator showing which HWRCs accept paint.

However, only **2%** of leftover paint is reused or remanufactured, and the estimated cost of disposing waste paint each year is **£20.6 million** to Local Government. Following the 2016 PaintCare survey of over 400 HWRCs in local authorities, **the majority of respondents confirmed that they do not accept liquid paint**, so it is a postcode lottery for the public, and they have no choice but to throw it in with general waste.

BCF consumer research has established that each household across the UK has **six cans of leftover paint** in their shed or garage, which householders keep for touch ups. When they want to dispose of their leftover paint, **98%** of it ends up incinerated or landfilled, and nearly half of this enters the general waste stream. The below table shows the cost to local authorities of disposing leftover decorative paint:

Disposal route	Cost/tonne	Estimated amount (%)	Estimated amount (tonnes)	Total cost to LAs
Remanufactured	£200	1%	715	£143,000
Donated for reuse	£200	1%	715	£143,000
Reuse as raw material in (say) concrete	£50	0%	-	£ -
Hazardous incinerated (with no energy recovery)	£500	48%	34,320	£17,160,000
General waste (incinerated - energy recovery)	£100	19%	13,585	£1,358,500
General waste (landfilled)	£85	29%	20,735	£1,762,475
Goes down the drain		2%	1,430	£ -
		100%	71,500	£20,556,975

Where paint is sorted at HWRCs, there is a small network of organisations in the UK which remanufacture and reuse paint, and almost all are social enterprises. As there is currently no market for leftover paint, many of these social enterprises find it challenging to sell and use the remanufactured paint.

The Solution

A national PaintCare solution for leftover decorative paint presents a **40% cost savings** per year to local Government, as shown in the table below, if PaintCare were implemented nationally. Sorting paint for remanufacturing and reuse, will allow manufacturers, existing and new, to build new supply streams for potentially valuable recovered raw materials and develop new markets for recycled paints.

Disposal route	Cost/tonne	Estimated amount (%)	Estimated amount (tonnes)	Total cost to LAs
Remanufactured	£200	18%	12,870	£2,574,000
Donated for reuse	£200	15%	10,725	£2,145,000
Reuse as raw material in (say) concrete	£50	50%	35,750	£1,787,500
Hazardous incinerated (with no energy recovery)	£500	15%	10,725	£5,362,500
General waste (incinerated - energy recovery)	£100	0%	-	-
General waste (landfilled)	£85	0%	-	-
Goes down the drain		2%	1,430	-
		100%	71,500	£11,869,000

To deliver these savings to local government, the BCF has devised three asks from Central Government, which will bring an overall net saving to the tax payer:

- 1. Government Procurement-** Until recently, there was a voluntary requirement for 5% of the Government’s furniture purchases be remanufactured. Demand from government clients for furniture remanufacturers provided an incentive for office furniture remanufacture.¹

Recommendation: The BCF proposes a similar requirement on Government to use remanufactured paint, specifying 5% of remanufactured paint in their painting projects, which should be of similar quality to original manufactured paint, containing at least 25-30% remanufactured content, but with half the eco footprint.

- 2. Accepting leftover paint in HWRCs-** The BCF research also established that **62% of respondents** use their HWRC at least once per year, pointing to the importance of the HWRC network as a means of collecting for leftover paint for remanufacturing.

Recommendation: The BCF calls for an expansion of the number of HWRCs accepting leftover paint for reuse and remanufacturing, to help create a circular economy.

Benefits of a National Scheme

The solutions delivered by PaintCare are already being supported by the industry, either through technical development of new products and the new manufacturing processes required to deliver them or through support for social enterprises. The benefits of a national scheme would be reaped by the industry, central and local government and consumers alike. Some of the benefits of the scheme are:

- Paint will not be incinerated or sent to landfill, creating environmental benefits and financial savings
- The scheme would present a 40% cost savings per year to Local Government
- Easing the burden on current paint remanufacturers will help lead to the growth of a new manufacturing sector, providing new jobs and opportunities for further world-leading innovation, and contribute to the circular economy
- Expanding the opportunity for social enterprises which contribute greatly to their local communities, by:
 - providing job skills training to the disadvantaged people they employ
 - preventing paint from ending up in landfill
 - contributing to community projects each year

About the BCF

The BCF represents the interests of 95% of the UK’s coatings, printing inks and wallcoverings manufacturers and comprises of over 160 companies, the majority of which are SMEs. The coatings industry has a direct impact on over £180bn of the UK’s GDP, supporting more than 300,000 jobs.

For further information, please contact the BCF’s Head of Public Affairs and Policy, Ellen Daniels, on ellen.daniels@bcf.co.uk or 01372 365997.

¹ http://www.wrap.org.uk/system/files/priv_download/Remanufacturing%20office%20furniture%20case%20study.pdf