

Sit Up And Listen!

 **RWM**
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Join Peter for the panel
discussion on 16 September
in the Local Authority Theatre



ESA chairman, **Peter Gerstrom**, reflects on the year to date: the General Election, the new attitude in Westminster, the Duty of Care... and in terms of the global commodity markets, he asks what it will take for us to pay attention

With RWM in partnership with CIWM upon us once again, it is an opportunity to reflect on what has been an exceptionally busy year so far in the waste and resource management sector, seeing many challenges and volatile trading conditions. The General Election in May resulted in a change in government, and renewed hope for our industry after a lack of engagement from the previous administration. We also saw the appointment of a new Minister, Rory Stewart OBE, and were impressed by the enlightening keynote speech he gave at the Annual Conference of ESA, CIWM and the Resource Association. However, it is now time for the Government to take action.



"Do we need a catastrophe in the waste and resource management sector for the Government to sit up and listen?" asks Peter Gerstrom, in the wake of the problems faced by Aylesford Newsprint and Closed Loop

With much higher recycling rates than in the past, our industry is now exposed to much higher levels of volatility and dependence on global commodity markets. Whilst delivering household recycling services remains an important priority for the industry, recycling collectors are unable to manage the long-term price risk associated with recyclates.

This volatility can clearly be seen with the sudden closure in February of Aylesford Newsprint, followed in May with the announcement that Dagenham-based bottle recycler Closed Loop Recycling was entering administration. In June, the Guardbridge paper mill in Fife closed its doors, and there have been further examples of reprocessors and MRFs either shutting down completely or reducing capacity.

Do we need a catastrophe in the waste and resource management sector for the Government to sit up and listen?

Despite these challenging times, the recycling industry can create long-term sustainable jobs at all skill levels, all around the country. With the resource sector growing at a faster rate than the wider economy, there is huge growth potential given the right investment and platform for infrastructure developments. It is encouraging to see that the Minister recognises this in terms of value, jobs, productivity, skills and exports.

That platform relies on regulations – regulations that are enforced – with prosecution for those that avoid them. For instance, recent reports suggest that only 50 percent of materials recycling facilities (MRFs) have notified the regulators for compliance with the new MRF Regulations. This means that it could take 18 months before the data truly reflects recycling quality across England and Wales. There is also new regulation concerning loss of ignition testing at landfills, which will need vigilant enforcement.

Anyone who manages controlled waste has a duty of care to deal with it responsibly, and a revised code of practice was launched for consultation in England and Wales at the end of July, running until 21 September. The outcome must be followed through with action, so we have a well-regulated sector, providing a healthy level playing field in which competition can thrive.

Given its importance, I will be chairing an ESA & CIWM panel discussion at RWM about the Duty of Care changes and their effect on our industry. I look forward to seeing you there. ■

Peter Gerstrom is currently the chief executive officer of Cory Environmental and was named as chair of the ESA in November 2014. He is also a Chartered Waste Manager. He has been in the waste industry 20 years with Onyx, Veolia, Cleanaway and Cory Environmental. He is also a past chairman of the Waste Board at the Institution of Civil Engineers.