

Composition and re-use potential of household bulky furniture in the UK

WRAP has undertaken research to understand the composition of bulky waste in terms of item type and re-use potential, in order to identify the barriers and opportunities for the re-use of bulky items across the UK. Items disposed of via local authority kerbside bulky waste collections (BWC) and at Household Waste and Recycling Centres (HWRCs) were included in the research.

The research recorded all bulky waste, including WRAP's priority materials of WEEE, textiles and furniture. Furniture was split into large hard furniture, small hard furniture and soft furniture.

The research recorded all bulky waste by analysing call centre logs for bulky waste kerbside collections, compositional analysis of kerbside collected bulky waste for re-use potential, and surveying individuals depositing bulky items at HWRC's.

Figure 1: Estimated tonnes of furniture items within bulky waste, UK 2010/11 (tonnes)

Item	HWRC national estimate	BWC national estimate	Total national estimate
Sofa	40,674	97,841	138,515
Wardrobe	80,478	23,658	104,136
Bed	32,585	43,446	76,031
Armchair	23,328	30,871	54,199
Chair	30,637	14,165	44,802
Chest of drawers	33,577	9,254	42,831
Table	12,667	10,003	22,670
All other furniture	Not Calculated	Not Calculated	187,000

How much furniture is there in bulky waste?

Around 42% of all bulky waste in the UK is furniture. This is around 670,000 tonnes.

What are the main furniture products being disposed of?

Figure 1 above shows the main furniture items that are disposed of as bulky waste and an estimate of the tonnage collected throughout the UK in 2010/11. Sofas, wardrobes and beds are the main items disposed.

How much could be re-used?

Over 20% of the furniture collected at the kerbside was assessed as being re-usable in its current condition with a further 25% assessed as re-usable with slight repair. It is interesting to note that even post-collection (with many items potentially subject to weather damage) furniture can be in a re-usable condition.

Just under 50% of the furniture collected at HWRCs was assessed as re-usable in its current condition or with slight repair. It is estimated that approximately 110,000 tonnes of furniture at HWRCs is re-usable in its current condition. Householders were also asked for their view of re-use

potential, approximately one third of the items were assessed by householders as re-usable (See Figure 2 below).

Sofas, armchairs, sofa-beds, fabric beds and headboards (soft furniture) were assessed for soiling. One quarter was described as very clean and a further third as fairly clean with slight soiling. This suggests that 58% of such items could be considered 'clean'.

Soft furniture was also assessed for the presence of fire labels. 50% each of armchairs and fabric beds still had fire labels attached. 33% of headboards, 63% of sofas and 64% of sofa-beds still had fire safety labels attached, meaning that these items could legally be re-used.

What are the opportunities?

Due to the amount of items that arise and the tonnage, sofas and beds present a significant re-use opportunity throughout the country. These 'utility' items are often in demand through the re-use sector. Whilst a large number of wardrobes are collected, the opportunities may be more limited because they may be fitted wardrobes or flat-pack and therefore less suitable for transportation, that is, it is more difficult to preserve their re-use potential.

Are there any differences between furniture taken to a HWRC and set out for a BWC?

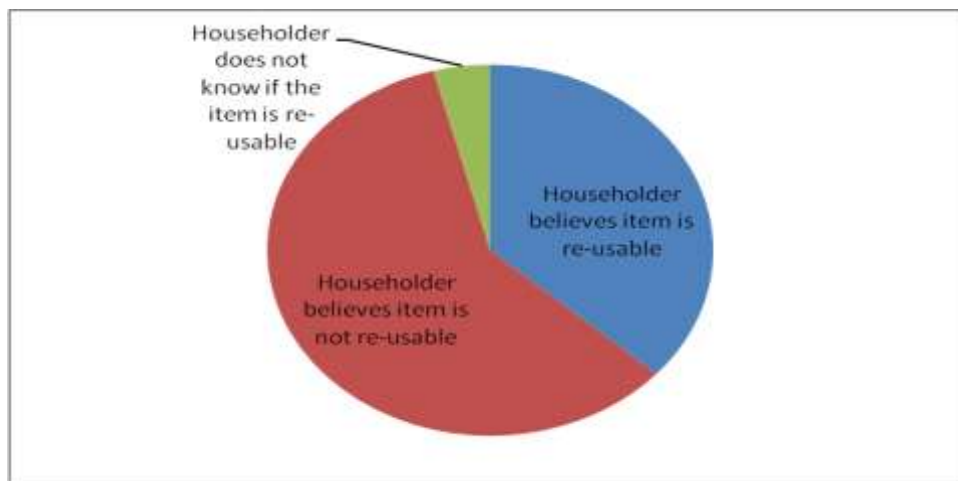
52% of bulky waste collected at the kerbside was furniture. At the HWRCs furniture accounted for 36%.

Are there any demographic differences?

- The average breakdown of kerbside bulky waste collected showed that similar proportions of furniture were set out by all ACORN^[1] categories.
- Data for bulky items delivered to HWRCs by different ACORN categories showed there were no significant trends discernible, although in general less furniture was taken to HWRCs by ACORN Category 1 and 3 households than Categories 2, 4 and 5.

[1] ACORN (acronym for A Classification Of Residential Neighbourhoods) is a geo-demographic information system categorising some United Kingdom postcodes into various types.

Figure 2: Householder opinion of re-use potential of their items



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