# Uk textile recycling faces collapse as disposal costs soar and infrastructure lags behind



Recent findings from the Waste & Resources Action Programme (WRAP) have highlighted a significant and growing crisis in the UK textile sector, primarily driven by the rising costs associated with disposing of used clothing. Currently, textile collectors and sorters in the UK are spending approximately US $118 million annually to manage unwanted textiles. WRAP warns that financial pressures may lead many of these vital operations to close, thereby pushing the associated costs onto consumers, charity shops, and local governments, which already spend US $97 million per year on textile management.

The implications of a potential sector collapse are stark. Should textile collectors and sorters exit the market, it is estimated that local authorities could incur an additional US $86 million annually in gate fees for textile disposal. This financial burden would force councils to either raise council tax rates or increase their reliance on landfills and incinerators for disposal methods, both of which would dramatically escalate the environmental impact of textile waste.

In 2022 alone, the UK generated approximately 1.45 million tonnes of used textiles, of which nearly 49% were discarded into general waste. Such rates are alarming and come with significant ecological consequences, as the incineration and landfill of textiles contribute an estimated 2.5 million tonnes of CO2 emissions each year. This growing waste problem not only threatens to negate efforts towards a circular economy but also raises urgent questions about consumer behaviour and recycling infrastructure.

WRAP’s initiatives aim to alleviate this impending crisis through technological and regulatory reforms. The organisation proposes the introduction of a nationwide network of automatic sorting plants, which could dramatically reduce sorting costs by half by 2035, offering a potential solution to the overwhelming pressure on waste management systems. With plans for fourteen advanced sorting facilities capable of processing 25,000 tonnes annually, there is hope that efficiencies can be achieved, enabling a smoother transition to a more circular textile economy.

Furthermore, WRAP has recommended that producers become more accountable for the lifecycle of their products through eco-modulated Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR). This strategy is designed to encourage manufacturers to create designs that are sustainable and circular, upholding the principles of just consumption and waste reduction. Moreover, the Textile Collections System Transition Programme aims to enhance collaboration between major brands and the recycling sector, fostering innovative takeback programs that contribute positively to both industry stakeholders and consumers.

Despite these measures, the road ahead remains fraught with challenges. The recycling infrastructure within the UK is currently inadequate, with a significant volume of textiles being incinerated—84% of used textiles that are discarded, as reported in 2022, met this fate. Additionally, escalating global tariffs on exports of second-hand clothing are placing further strain on this vital recycling pathway, complicating attempts to sustainably manage textile waste.

The combination of increased consumerism, declining value of recovered textiles, and external market pressures is generating a perfect storm for the UK’s textile recycling efforts. The need for more robust and innovative solutions is essential. As WRAP advocates for strengthened recycling practices and consumer awareness, it emerges that significant industry-wide collaboration and government support will be crucial in addressing the looming textile recycling crisis. Without these collective initiatives, the long-term environmental impacts could be dire, exacerbating the already critical situation faced by local authorities and the planet.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7.
2. Paragraph 3.
3. Paragraph 3.
4. Paragraph 4.
5. Paragraph 4.
6. Paragraph 6.
7. Paragraph 7.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://apparelresources.com/business-news/sustainability/wrap-warns-increasing-yearly-cost-disposing-used-clothing-uk/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.wrap.ngo/resources/report/textiles-market-situation-report-2024> - The Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) released the 'Textiles Market Situation Report 2024,' revealing that in 2022, the UK consumed 1.42 million tonnes of new textile products. The report also highlights that approximately 1.45 million tonnes of used textiles were generated, with 49% of these being discarded into general waste, leading to significant environmental concerns. The report emphasizes the need for improved recycling infrastructure and consumer behavior changes to address the growing textile waste issue.
3. <https://www.sustainability-beat.co.uk/2024/05/07/textile-landfill-wrap/> - An article from Sustainability Beat discusses WRAP's findings that nearly half (49%) of used textiles in the UK are discarded into general waste, resulting in environmental harm and challenges for the second-hand clothing market. The piece underscores the urgency for enhanced recycling infrastructure and consumer awareness to mitigate the impact of textile waste on the environment and the economy.
4. <https://www.fibre2fashion.com/news/textile-news/uk-s-textile-recycling-crisis-infrastructure-gaps-export-challenges-294705-newsdetails.htm> - Fibre2Fashion reports on the UK's textile recycling crisis, highlighting infrastructure gaps and export challenges. The article notes that in 2022, approximately 711,000 tonnes of used textiles were discarded into general waste, with 84% incinerated and 11% sent to landfill. It also discusses the reliance on exporting used clothing to countries facing increasing tariffs, exacerbating the recycling sector's challenges.
5. <https://www.alderbioinsights.co.uk/news-and-insights/insights/textile-waste-and-recycling-challenges-and-opportunities/> - Alder BioInsights provides an overview of textile waste and recycling challenges in the UK. The article details that in 2022, the UK consumed 1.42 million tonnes of new textiles and generated 1.45 million tonnes of used textiles. It emphasizes that over half of these used textiles were discarded into residual waste streams, raising significant concerns for the industry's circular economy goals.
6. <https://www.wrap.ngo/media-centre/press-releases/price-our-addiction-to-cheap-fast-fashion-pressure-builds-uk-second-hand> - WRAP's press release highlights the impact of fast fashion on the UK's second-hand clothing market. The release reveals that 49% of used textiles are discarded into general waste, with each person throwing away 35 items annually. It also notes a significant decline in the value of recovered textiles from textile banks and charity shops over the past decade, urging for increased support for the recycling sector.
7. <https://www.zerocarbonacademy.com/posts/uk-government-urged-to-address-a-looming-textile-recycling-crisis> - The Zero Carbon Academy discusses the looming textile recycling crisis in the UK, citing concerns from the Textile Recycling Association about the sector's imminent collapse due to financial pressures and global market challenges. The article highlights the need for government intervention to support the recycling sector and prevent environmental consequences associated with increased textile waste.