

## **Waste?Not! Turning Refuse into Quality Products**

**Emer O'Connell**, European Pathway to Zero Waste, UK

There's value in almost everything we throw away, but the stigma of waste and the regulations which surround it can prove significant deterrents both to recyclers and product users, and a particular barrier to resource efficiency.

In a practical approach to the problem, the Environment Agency and WRAP have set out criteria which, if followed, allow refuse-derived materials to be safely recycled into quality products without getting bound up in complex and sometimes costly red tape of waste regulations.

End of waste 'Quality Protocols' are now in place for around a dozen materials, from aggregates to plastics, stimulating diversion of millions of tonnes of re-usable materials that would otherwise have ended up in landfill, onto the market as high quality recycled products and raw materials that customers can use with confidence.

In simple terms, complying with a Quality Protocol means that, what would have been labelled 'waste' - with all the negative associations that go with it - is not!

The results speak for themselves. The introduction of Quality Protocols in the UK is estimated to have brought the following benefits:

- 21 millions tonnes of waste diverted from landfill
- 41 millions of tonnes of raw materials saved
- £162m cost savings to businesses
- £84m increased sales, and
- 220,000 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> avoided.

The European Pathway to Zero Waste (EPOW) – a partnership between the Environment Agency and WRAP - is promoting Quality Protocols as part of an EU Life funded programme to demonstrate effective ways of stimulating a resource-efficient 'recycling society'.