



Waste Disposal Units

ceda Guide 050

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Waste Disposal Units

Introduction

Waste disposal units have long been an accepted tool for the hygienic disposal of food waste and operate by grinding the food waste into small particles in a flow of cold water before flushing them down the drain.



Recent legislation has changed the situation and waste disposal units can no longer be used in this way.



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Legislation

Water Industry Act 1991:

S111(1)(a) Water industry Act 1991 provides that “no person shall throw, empty or turn, or suffer or permit to be thrown or emptied or to pass, into any public sewer, or into any drain or sewer communicating with a public sewer any matter likely to injure the sewer or drain, to interfere with the free flow of its contents or to affect prejudicially the treatment and disposal of its contents”.

These offences are now subject to the new Environmental Sentencing Guidelines.

Whilst the act has been in force for over 30 years, most water companies did not consider food waste to be injurious to the sewer and allowed it to be disposed of into the sewer providing it did not include Fats, Oils or Grease (FOG). Indeed some food actually helped the sewage treatment process.

Environmental legislation

As part of the overall drive to reduce waste, legislation has been introduced to reduce food waste and to encourage recycling through such means as Composting and Anaerobic Digestion. The Environment (Wales) Act 2016, The Waste (Scotland) Regulations 2012 and the Food Waste Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 all now make it illegal to use waste disposal units to discharge food waste into the sewer in the devolved nations. The Environment Act 2021 will also make it similarly illegal in England when the appropriate section comes into force following DEFRA consultation. The original date for this to go live was sometime in 2023. In October 2023, the Government announced that this would now definitely happen before 31st March 2026.

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Waste Disposal Units and Dewaterers



Currently in Scotland and Northern Ireland, waste disposal units can still be used providing that the solid food waste in the output slurry is separated and collected for recycling by the use of a dewaterer. This also has the benefit of reducing the volume of solid waste that needs to be stored prior to collection for recycling by up to 80%.

The Welsh government has banned the use of dewaterers since April 2024.

In England they can still be used until the law comes into force no later than the 31st March 2026.

Recommendations to members

Scotland and Northern Ireland

You should advise your clients that waste disposal units discharging directly into the drains are no longer allowed and recommend that they either have the waste disposal unit connected to a dewaterer as suggested above or alternatively have it decommissioned or preferably removed.

Wales

Waste disposal units are banned including the use of dewaterers.

England

You should advise your clients that waste disposal units discharging directly into the drains will no longer be allowed after 31st March 2026 and recommend that they either have the waste disposal unit connected to a dewaterer as suggested above or alternatively have it decommissioned or preferably removed.