

The true value of waste.

Not many people genuinely believe that the best way of getting rid of mess is to sweep it under the carpet. Yet this is precisely what we do with landfill. Every nappy, every tin can, every plastic bottle, everything we chuck out. Of course, recent attempts to establish and improve recycling help. But I was horrified to discover in a conversation with our local bin man- or should I say ecological operator – that most of the stuff we put in our [blue] recycling bin goes to landfill regardless. The best way of dealing with rubbish is to burn it in specialist clean burn power stations to produce electricity. They do this with great success on the Isle of Man. The landfill site in the north of the island was closed down and now everything that can be burnt is burnt. This does have drawbacks- it can cost as much as £60.00 to get rid of an old fridge- but the advantages speak for themselves. Future Manx generations will be able to lift the carpet and find no mess. And, eventually, the capital costs of building the two “power from waste” stations- in Douglas and Peel- will be recovered. Our own government’s attitude to the problem has been a disaster. Some poor householders have to put up with three different bins and bin police and bin fines and bin taxes. Of course this creates lots of silly jobs for small minded people but it does nothing- really- to even start solving the problem. We need a change- as Mr.Cameron likes to say.

Attempts have been made by successive British administrations for central government to change personal behaviour by fiscal “carrot and stick” measures. I believe that this, not only does not work, but also leads to an increasing individual resentment of government. And this is not just because these measures always lean more to the “stick” side of the equation. Any increase in legislation and regulation inevitably lead to more enforcement. And this results in more individual resentment and a further blurring of the difference between policing and enforcement. The “carrot” side of the equation is really no more than the opportunity to escape possible enforcement and fiscal punishment. People realise that perhaps this is not such a good deal and feel resentful and of course do nothing to change their individual behaviour. So how are we to proceed? How can we –as individuals and without any enforcement or coercion- change things? Quite simply by doing it for ourselves. And not only for the benefit of ourselves, but also for the benefit of that which lies beneath the carpet.

Ferrous metal prices have recently risen to £200.00 per tonne. This, of course, goes up and down like a tart’s drawers, but this is for the long term and the most important thing is to get the principle of the matter into the brain. Lots of the stuff we throw away has a value- a real, cash value. So forget about what colour bin the council want you to have- get your own. Anything will do. And anything that sticks to a magnet is ferrous metal which has a value. So pop it in your bin and wait.

As a household, we do not buy much that comes in tins. A few tins of tomatoes etc. and, of course dog food. Our spaniel eats one a day and- much to his annoyance- our Labrador also eats one. And it was that that got me thinking about this. My wife thinks that I am barking myself. But each tin I clean and squash and put in my stash does not get swept under the carpet. And each tin weighs about 45g and so you only need about 22,223 to make up a tonne. So it would take me – on my own at my present tin consumption- 21 years to get £200.00 at to-day’s price. You can see my wife’s point of view. But if people got together- you know the Blue Peter sort of thing- it makes sense.

Anyway, I intend to carry on. It annoys the wife and makes me feel better.