

2007: The Year of the Pig?

By Derek Morgan, Head of Strategy, CKS Group plc.

According to the Chinese calendar 2007 is the year of the Pig. Contrary to its rather negative reputation in the West, the Pig of Chinese astrology may be the most generous and honourable sign of the zodiac. This sign believes in the best qualities of mankind and certainly doesn't consider itself to be superior. On the downside, with their magnanimity comes naivety.

Environmentally, 2006 was the year of the "consultation".

DEFRA used Valentine's Day to try and hammer some reality into the romantic idealism around the UK's 20-year waste strategy. The DTI infamously engaged in yet another round of discussions on the implementation challenges of the WEEE Directive. The EU started to deal with the fact that waste might actually become useable product again, and began to define protocols for reclassifying waste as non-waste. To finish off 2006 we were all invited to comment on proposed revisions to the grand-daddy of them all, the Waste Framework Directive, including the Hazardous Waste Directive.

Whew! What a year 2006 was - the year of the Dog.

A lot of hard work has gone into creating a new vision for environmental management. The goals are aspirational and the impacts far reaching. Rather than waste management, it's all about life-cycle resource management. Rather than outright ownership, it's all about obligations and responsibilities that don't pass-on at point-of-sale. Rather than user cost responsibilities its producer pays. Good stuff all – but the devil is definitely in the details.

During 2007 our challenge is ensuring that the proposed sea-change doesn't lead to deterioration in standards and worse still, an angry consumer backlash. Both are possible.

Bins, bins & yet more bins

Inherent in the new waste regulations is the importance of separation. Recognising that people don't deliberately buy hazardous products: but, that the appliance may contain hazardous elements; and, that perishable and biological waste are a natural consequence of daily life... responsibility for separation is being pushed all the way down the chain to the household or business user. Fair enough, but the unintended consequence is potentially an almighty clash between petty bureaucracy and frustrated householders drowning in colour coded wheelie bins.

The courts have not helped. During 2006, the courts have placed a burden of proof on the local authorities that is forcing an array of needless surveillance and tracking gadgetry down on the suspicious neighbourhood. Duty of Care is being eaten alive by fears over the invasion of privacy and a turf war for tenancy of the little pavement space in our towns and cities. Indeed, the revised Duty of Care regime was a notable absentee for much of the consultation process. Mores the pity as it provides the legal framework around the remaining responsibilities for home and business users alike.

Sadly, the principles of proportionality and the risk driven approach to priority issues are missing in action. We all need to put these concepts front-stage in our approach going forward.

Our magnanimity is being undone by our naivety. Welcome to the life of the Pig.

Fostering ID theft, fraud & cherry picking

In Chinese astrology the Pigs are simply possessed of a truly luxurious nature, one that delights in finery and riches. We should bear the "magpie effect" in mind as we begin to implement our new plans. Whilst we have removed some cost responsibilities from users we've not built-in any new protections for them either.

Contemporary electrical and electronic equipment (EEE) is more than simply a mass of parts, plastics and metals. Fundamentally it is a platform for data – personal, banking and business data. When it becomes waste, or WEEE, treatment is all about effectively separating and dealing with the hazardous and non-hazardous components. Sadly, there is zero recognition of the data carrying capacity of typical WEEE.

Indeed, the WEEE treatment loop is highly porous and appliances and components are available to a range of charitable and social enterprises before even the waste industry or commercial refurbishers have a chance to deal with data destruction. Cherry picking is encouraged as is recruitment of the unemployable.

So, on one hand our bins spy on us, and on the other they give away our secrets.

Export, export & yet more export

In the waste strategy consultation, DEFRA identified a dramatic shortfall in materials recycling facilities that would be required under the proposed regulations. At a cost upwards of £10 billion, it was estimated that between 250 and 700 new facilities would be required in the UK by 2010 and 2020.

While Ken Livingston's council is debating ethical policy to prevent dumping London's hazardous waste on the countryside, as a nation we are reducing the controls and increased the incentives to exporting our waste to Europe for treatment and reprocessing. Indeed, ICER estimates upwards of 90% of UK waste will be exported for reprocessing. Further, many businesses are actively encouraged to ship absolute hazards (such as CRT monitors) to Africa and Asia as "assets" rather than waste. Simply, charity is cheaper than hazardous landfill and proper treatment in Europe.

We have avoided a repeat of the unsightly fridge-mountains by building our new CRT-mountains out of sight.

Ken's right - we need local solutions to local problems.

Diminished Standards

The biggest challenge is yet to come though. In the past there was little real pressure on the UK as our waste management standards were fairly high and recycling targets easily met. But with cost responsibilities moving to the new compliance schemes, least cost practice is rapidly becoming entrenched and the push to export to low cost European facilities is hampering the development of new capabilities.

The EU is pushing for a subtle change in focus for our national infrastructure from installations that take account of "the best available technology not involving excessive costs" to simply those that take account of "the best available technology," period. Now that's progress, but producers have a responsibility to fund the local infrastructure.

Some final advice from chineseastrology.com... Pigs do well when they realize that there's more to life than being needed. When they open up their world to a diverse group of people, they will truly bloom.

Let's make this Pig fly!

CKS: LEADING INNOVATION IN ELECTRONIC RECYCLING

The CKS Group specialises in secure asset recovery and the environmental disposal of IT & Telecoms equipment.

- PCs, Laptops & MP3 Players – Often have a high resale or charitable donation value, but poor adoption by the industry of effective data deletion standards exposes businesses and individuals to risk.
- CRT Monitors & Batteries – Contain unacceptable thresholds of hazards and toxins for which there are few treatment options available anywhere in Europe. The risk of contaminating ground water with heavy metals is high and special care is required during handling.
- Servers & Network Equipment – Configuration and security details contained on the servers and network devices pose a peculiar and important risk that demands specialist decommissioning skills at end-of-life.

Responsible business demands more than minimal compliance and generic WEEE processing. The focus of the UK's WEEE implementation has been on household users and servicing local civic amenity sites at the least possible cost. That's not our focus.

Professional advisors and technical engineers are available immediately to work with you to avoid scandal and minimise risk. To meet the needs of security-conscious customers, CKS is investing heavily in establishing new facilities within the UK that will offer secure end-to-end recycling to the best available standards. Period.

With CKS you don't get shortcuts. You get best practice and peace of mind.

For more information contact us on 01344 307 788 or visit us online at www.cksgroup.co.uk

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