

2020.03.09

6 Deputy S.M. Ahier of the Minister for Infrastructure regarding the recycling of milk cartons: (OQ.74/2020)

Will the Minister advise the Assembly whether he will consider arranging the despatch of used milk cartons to facilities such as the Halifax Recycling Centre, where they can be recycled, so that they are not otherwise burnt in the incinerator?

Deputy K.C. Lewis (The Minister for Infrastructure):

Recycling cartons may be looked at in the future, but it is not currently a priority for the Department. Our work will continue to evolve and we will most certainly investigate the feasibility of recycling new materials, high grade uPVC (unplasticised polyvinyl chloride) such as windows and doorframes is an example that the Department is keen to move forward. Officers were visiting potential recycling partners last week. Before starting any new recycling initiative, we will assess the environmental benefit of the separate collection export and recycling, compared with local energy recovery and our efforts will be prioritised on those that generate the greatest impact.

3.6.1 Deputy S.M. Ahier:

These cartons are 100 per cent recyclable. We only need to transport them to have a beneficial effect on our carbon footprint. Does the Minister believe that £20 per tonne to recycle them is deemed too expensive?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

Liquid cartons cannot be recycled using the current recycling bins available in Jersey, as they are made up from a composite material containing paper board and plastic. Long-life cartons also commonly contain a thin layer of aluminium. If cartons were collected for recycling, they would need to be collected separately and exported to a specialist carton recycling facility. The Halifax Recycling Centre, referenced in the question, refers to a beverage carton recycling facility. The facility is the only current recycling plant in the U.K. and is capable of recycling up to 40 per cent of the U.K.'s cartons. Our understanding is that the cartons collected by U.K. local councils are not delivered to the Halifax facility and are sent overseas.

3.6.2 Deputy I. Gardiner of St. Helier:

I would like to check with the Minister if he was aware about undergoing work by Jersey Dairy to replace the cartons. As the Scrutiny Report last year indicated the willingness to recycle the milk cartons, it seems strange that after a year we introduce new cartons that cannot be recycled. Has the Minister had any conversations with Jersey Dairy about recycled cartons?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

I believe our officers have, but the new cartons, they may look like cardboard, but they are, in fact, plastic covered, so it is difficult separating the various components.

3.6.3 Deputy I. Gardiner:

The question was that following Scrutiny recommendation that we would like to see milk cartons recycled on the Island my question was: have Jersey Dairy engaged with the Department when they developed their new cartons, that these cartons will be able to recycle on the Island?

[15:30]

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

I was not aware of that. I believe my officers are in regular contact with all the various firms on Island. I will need to check up on that and get back to the Deputy.

3.6.4 Deputy M. Tadier:

Could the Minister state whether the production of Jersey Milk produces more of a carbon footprint than the packaging of Jersey Milk?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

I would need to research that. I could not honestly say whether Jersey Milk has an increased footprint on the Island. That is something I would need to look into.

3.6.5 Deputy M. Tadier:

There seems to be a lot of talk about the packaging of Jersey Milk and the environmentally friendliness of it, but are there not a couple of things that come into the issue which are more prescient, more salient, one is that we have got an Energy from Waste plant that burns recyclables and as long as we have that, there is going to be very little incentive for people to recycle properly. The second point is that the whole of the farming industry in Jersey needs to take steps to try and ... I will leave it to one question, so I think we should have ...

The Deputy Bailiff:

What is your question, Deputy Tadier?

Deputy M. Tadier:

The one is about the Energy from Waste plant and is that not the real issue? If we continue to want to feed an Energy from Waste plant, then any recycling strategy is going to be hampered before we even start.

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

I thank the Deputy for the eventual question. It was regarding the farmers and obviously everybody, including farmers, we need to up our game when it comes to recycling. We try to recycle as much as possible. Obviously, we send cans away for recycling. We send metals away for recycling. We have got huge plants down at La Collette collecting plastic bottles and they are sent away for recycling, but there are some composite materials that are very difficult to separate. As I mentioned earlier, a combination of cardboard and plastics with metal film inside. A lot of drinks cartons have like an aluminium type liner inside, again difficult to separate. But this is work in progress. The Department would like to recycle as much as possible and only incinerating that which we cannot recycle.

3.6.6 Deputy K.F. Morel:

I am slightly concerned by some of the assertions made in the Minister's answer. Will the Minister please endeavour to contact this plant in Halifax, because they do indeed recycle the plastic and the aluminium, making roofing tiles and construction panels out of them. In light of that, would the Minister endeavour to contact the recycling plant in Halifax to ensure that his facts are correct?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

Yes, the team have been in contact with the Centre and, as I pointed out, that it is a beverage carton recycling facility, so there are certain cartons that even they do not recycle. But, as I say, it is a work in progress. We would like to recycle as much as possible and if we can recycle it we will do so.

3.6.7 Deputy K.F. Morel:

While looking at the Government of Jersey website, it does say at the moment that we do not currently collect food and drink cartons for recycling. It says because they would have to be sent for specialist recycling in Europe; because not all component parts are recycled they then incinerate them. This statement on the States of Jersey website appears to be incorrect, because they do not have to send them to Europe and it also appears incorrect because all the component parts of drinks cartons can be recycled. Will the Minister commit to ensuring that the Government of Jersey website is updated to show the correct picture?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

I am more than happy to check out the Government website, to make sure that is up to date. But, as I say, if lots of debris is put in with everything else, eggshells, teabags in with the rubbish, we do not have anybody there physically separating them out, so they would have to be collected separately and deposited for so to do. If something enters the incineration stream, or the Energy Recovery Unit, as we call it now, which is a much higher grade, then it goes for incineration. We do not have hundreds of people with rubber gloves going through the rubbish to take out what needs to be recycled. We rely on people using the bring back system. We have many collection points down at La Collette and about 7 or 8 points around the Island where things can be deposited. But I will bring it to the attention of the Department.

3.6.8 Deputy R. Labey of St. Helier:

Is it just me, or do these new cartons leak? **[Laughter]** And to bring the question in order, does that have any effect on the recyclability?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

I think, under Standing Orders, a Minister can be asked any question for which he has political responsibility; leaky cartons is not one of them. But more than happy to bring that to the attention of Jersey Milk.

3.6.9 The Connétable of St. Brelade:

On a recent visit to Guernsey, my Panel noted that milk cartons are recycled over there by the same company that deals with the cardboard and the plastic over here. Would the Minister please agree to speak to the company and make arrangements to recycle our milk cartons?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

More than happy to speak to the company, but officers in the Department have already spoken to them. My officers have come to the conclusion it is not viable, as yet. But talks will be ongoing.

3.6.10 Deputy R.J. Ward:

Would the Minister not agree that the recycling issues that he talked about shows a lack of a culture of recycling, which has not been developed by the Government of this Island and therefore it has to start with the Government. So, perhaps, the first thing to do is to encourage cartons that can be recycled and then encourage the recycling, rather than the incineration. Is that not the way forward, Minister?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

Yes, we do not encourage incineration. Incineration is a by-product. I say, more than happy to recycle as much as possible. But, at the moment, as I say, we have 12 Parishes, 8 are recycling, 2 are

in the process of switching over to recycling and collections and negotiations are ongoing with the other 2. But it is something that the Department is working on. A lot of Parishes now, who deal with collections on a door to door basis are very keen to promote and I congratulate them for their efforts in recycling and we are the recipients of that and we will despatch as much to the U.K. for recycling as possible.

3.6.11 Deputy S.M. Ahier:

Every small step we take contributes to our carbon neutrality. Has the Minister undertaken a feasibility study, to see what the full costings are of recycling milk cartons and, if not, will he commit to undertake such a study?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

As I stated, I am more than happy for the officers to work on that and to see the feasibility of recycling cartons.