FREE GUIDE · STUDIO KEY

Digital Waste Tracking: what it means for your business

A short, plain-English summary of the government's new digital waste tracking rules: who has to use the service, when, what has to be reported, and what you can do now.

Information checked against GOV.UK on 26 November 2026. General information only, not legal advice. Always check the latest GOV.UK guidance.

What digital waste tracking is

Digital waste tracking is a new government service for recording waste movements online. Its first part, called "Report receipt of waste", is for organisations that are licensed or permitted to receive waste. They must use it to report details of the waste they receive.[1] The service covers controlled waste only.[2]

Who has to use it, and when

Who	When	Status
Sites licensed or permitted to receive controlled waste in England and Wales	From 1 October 2026	Now in force[2]
Receiving sites in Scotland and Northern Ireland	From 1 January 2027	Announced[3]
Waste collectors (the government's next phase, for carriers, brokers and dealers)	From October 2027	Planned[4]

For the next phase, the government's timeline says the service will be offered to an invited group of waste collectors from autumn 2026, then publicly from spring 2027, before becoming mandatory for waste collectors from October 2027.[4] These dates are described as planned, so they may change.

There are some exemptions. For example, household waste received from residents at a household waste recycling centre in England does not need to be reported.[2]

What receiving sites must report

The details required are set out in Schedule 1 of the England and Wales regulations. GOV.UK lists them as:[2]

- waste movement, carrier and receiver details
- waste classification codes, also known as List of Waste (LoW) or European Waste Catalogue (EWC) codes
- recovery and disposal codes

- persistent organic pollutants (POPs) data, where relevant
- hazardous waste data, where relevant

> **Deadlines**
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> Records must be submitted within 2 working days, not counting weekends and bank holidays, starting from the day after the waste is received. Errors must be corrected as soon as possible, and always within 1 month of finding them.[2]

Paperwork you still need

For now, paper-based tracking continues alongside the digital service. You must still complete waste transfer notes, Annex VII forms and hazardous waste consignment notes where they are required, and keep submitting waste returns.[2] GOV.UK has not yet given a date for when this changes.

How to get access

- You need a Defra account, signed in with your organisation's Government Gateway or GOV.UK One Login. GOV.UK says not to use a personal Government Gateway account.[1]
- You can report through compatible waste software that connects to Defra's API, or by using Defra's spreadsheet template. You cannot use your own spreadsheet or change the template.[1]
- The service costs £26 a year for each organisation on your account, with the first payment due by 31 January 2027.[1]
- GOV.UK publishes a list of compatible software providers.[3]

If the rules are not followed

GOV.UK says not complying is an offence. Possible action includes compliance notices, a fixed monetary penalty of £1,000, a variable monetary penalty of an unlimited amount, and criminal prosecution with an unlimited fine. Knowingly making false or misleading records can lead to up to 2 years in prison.[2]

How software connects: the API

An API (application programming interface) is a secure link between two computer systems. GOV.UK describes it as something that "allows different software systems to connect to each other so they can securely exchange data".[1] In practice, your waste software sends each record straight to Defra, so nobody has to retype it or fill in a spreadsheet.

- Defra's Receipt of Waste API is already open for receiving sites. When you register, Defra gives your organisation a unique API code to pass to your software provider.[1]
- Software providers must register with Defra, run its production approval tests and confirm their software meets the requirements before Defra gives them live access. This is a self-certification process: Defra does not approve or endorse software.[5]
- For the next phase, Defra says it is "exploring the development of new APIs" so that waste carriers and receivers can both submit data this way.[5] The technical details for waste collectors have not been published yet.
- Defra expects its spreadsheet option to stay in place "until at least October 2027", while organisations get software in place.[4]

What you can do now

- [ ] Check whether you receive controlled waste under a licence or permit, using the GOV.UK checker.[2]
- [ ] If you collect or carry waste, ask the sites you deliver to what information they need from you to report on time.
- [ ] Make sure every load has the right waste code, quantity and carrier details recorded when it is collected.
- [ ] Keep your records together and searchable, so you can find any load quickly.
- [ ] Keep an eye on GOV.UK for confirmed dates for the next phase.[4]

Where Studio Key fits in

We build bespoke systems for waste operators that record collections, waste transfer notes and weighbridge paperwork digitally, with the details captured at the point of collection.

We're preparing our system to connect to Defra's API, so the records you already keep with us can be sent to the government when reporting applies to you, without being entered twice. We'll confirm the connection details as Defra publishes them.

Going digital now gives you time to get your records complete and consistent before waste collectors are due to start reporting from October 2027. Our system doesn't replace the government's service: it keeps your records in order and gets them ready to send.

Talk to Rich on 07356 171658, or book a demo at www.studio-key.co.uk/waste

Sources

1. GOV.UK, "Report receipt of waste", published 28 April 2026, updated 19 October 2026. gov.uk/guidance/report-receipt-of-waste
2. GOV.UK, "Digital waste tracking: check if you need to report the waste you receive", published 7 August 2026, updated 19 October 2026. gov.uk/guidance/digital-waste-tracking-check-if-you-need-to-report-the-waste-you-receive
3. GOV.UK, "Report receipt of waste: choose a software provider", updated 10 November 2026. gov.uk/government/publications/report-receipt-of-waste-choose-a-software-provider
4. GOV.UK, "Digital waste tracking service" policy paper, updated 1 October 2026 (Timelines). gov.uk/government/publications/digital-waste-tracking-service
5. Defra, "Digital Waste Tracking Developer Guide: Receipt of Waste API", checked 26 November 2026. defra.github.io/waste-tracking-service

Important information

- This guide is general information about government requirements, checked against GOV.UK and Defra's developer guide on 26 November 2026. It is not legal advice. Take your own advice on how the rules apply to your business.
- Studio Key is not part of, affiliated with or endorsed by Defra, the Environment Agency or any other government body.
- Dates, requirements and technical details are set by the government and may change. Our connection to Defra's service depends on Defra publishing an API for your type of business and on us completing Defra's onboarding process. If Defra's timetable or requirements change, our plans may change too.
- The Defra connection is part of an active Studio Key subscription. Monthly: your subscription needs to be running when the connection goes live and while you report. If you cancel before then, we can't connect your records or support your reporting. Yearly: you pay in advance for the year ahead, so the connection and our help setting it up are included if it becomes available during your paid year.
- You remain responsible for meeting your own legal obligations, including reporting accurately and on time.
- As far as the law allows, we accept no liability for any loss arising from reliance on this guide. Our services are provided under our terms of business for waste collection systems, available on request.

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