



Science for Environment Policy

Support for 'pay-as-you-throw' waste schemes increases once experienced

Public support for pay-as-you-throw (PAYT) waste schemes is significantly higher among those who have actually experienced them, finds new research. The study indicates that there is less resistance to such schemes, which charge householders a fee that varies with the amount of waste collected, once they have been introduced.

Greenhouse gas emissions from [landfill](#) sites are an example of an environmental 'externality'. This is a social welfare or environmental cost not directly borne by the manufacturer or consumer. In this case, individual households often do not bear the full costs of handling the waste they generate. Such costs can include reduced landfill space, as well as ecological impacts and increased greenhouse gas emissions.

One solution to account for these externalities is through taxes or charges on the products or services. These can provide an incentive for behaviour change (for either manufacturers or consumers), and are often advocated as a way of addressing environmental problems.

However, public support for environmental taxes can vary, and they can be politically challenging to implement if support is low. Research has revealed that the public are often concerned about how revenue from the taxes is likely to be spent. They may also be worried about 'fairness' or may generally resist policy changes.

For this study, researchers examined public support for environmental taxes using data from the [OECD](#) 'Environmental Policy for Individual Behaviour Change (EPIC)' survey. Four countries with sufficiently widespread mixed residential waste PAYT schemes (Canada, the Netherlands, Sweden and Switzerland) were selected for analysis, covering over 3 500 households.

In addition to information on their current waste management systems and degree of support, the survey also gathered a range of information on general attitudes to waste as a global environmental issue, preferences for fairness, trust in government and general willingness to pay for good environmental policies.

The analysis was careful to control for factors that could skew the conclusions, such as the possibility that existing PAYT systems were implemented in areas where residents were more supportive of them beforehand.

The results showed that respondents who were less willing to accept any financial burden from environmental policy were also less likely to support PAYT schemes. The stronger respondents felt about fairness, the more likely they were to support PAYT over other options.

The key finding of the research was that experience of a PAYT scheme led to increased support for them; in populations exposed to PAYT, support was approximately 10% higher. This finding was consistent even when controlling for factors such as relative support for other waste reduction policies, or biases such as pre-existing support before PAYT introduction. The study's authors suggest that this raises important policy and political questions. For example, should democratic governments implement a policy, in the face of initial opposition, when there is strong evidence that public support will change following implementation?

The findings also suggest that factors such as attitudes regarding fairness, reciprocity and trust, as well as knowledge of PAYT, also play a role in people's acceptance of such schemes. As such, investing resources in a more active dialogue with stakeholders, rather than passive informational campaigns, may help build support for PAYT schemes.

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