Lord de Mauley, a minister in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), has just announced to local authorities that new EU rules will see Britons everywhere forced to separate their recycling into at least 4 boxes. The rules that will come into force in 2015 will see everyone have separate boxes for their unwanted paper, metal, glass and plastic.

This drive for efficiency is being made in the hope of increasing the quality of the products integral to the recycling sector. Specifically, it is expected that this will improve the quality of recyclates – the raw materials that are processed at a recycling plant – as they will not be mixed in with other types of waste.

In the letter, Lord Mauley does acknowledge that most material recovery facilities (MRFs) are fully equipped to separate mixed waste already. However, he correctly points out that although MRFs separate metals and plastics very well, they struggle separating glass and paper.

The response to this news has been mixed. Councils that are already under financial strain have been left wondering how they are meant to be able to do more work for less money. Homeowners have also been left wondering with regards to where they are meant to store these extra bins. In general, the front garden of the small and typically British urban terrace house has already been swamped by plastic bins and boxes, so this is a legitimate concern.

Although we fully agree that people need to be encouraged to recycle, we would be wary of forcing them to do too much. In our experience as a rubbish removal service, we have noticed that even as things stand many people feel that recycling is a confusing and time consuming activity. Perhaps time and money would be better spent focusing on the further development of MRFs, instead.

If they can be made to run faultlessly then we could all go back to the days of having one bin per household.

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