Chartered Institution of Wastes Management Press Release 2005

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Climate Change: Rubbish or a Burning Issue? - Mar 05

The Chartered Institution of Wastes Management warned Government today that they must get serious about replacing fossil fuels with fuels made from our own rubbish. If Government is genuinely earnest about climate change and resource efficiency it must come off the fence and support energy recovery from waste. The UK lags behind best European practice here and strong political leadership – from the very top – is needed to move us forwards.

The Environment Agency launched its first climate change report today. It identifies climate change as the biggest threat to our future. It also points a clear finger of blame at greenhouse gas releases for the runaway impacts we can already see and can predict in the future. We all have a role in slowing the engine of climate change – and that includes the way we manage our wastes.

Steve Lee, Chief Executive of the Chartered Institution of Wastes Management said: "Recycling is vital. The UK must up its efforts to save more from our waste. It saves resources and helps save energy. But, recycling can only get us so far.

"We think that about a half of our bin wastes can be recycled – and we currently recycle about a quarter. If we manage to recycle half of it, that would leave an enormous (and growing) 15 million tonnes each year of post recycling waste. This "residual" waste still contains very valuable energy – enough to replace 2 whole coal burning power stations. This will help cut coal use and stop methane from landfills (four times as strong as carbon dioxide in its greenhouse effect)".

Government must be positive in its support for energy from waste. Defra's review of the Waste Strategy for England, ODPM's review of the waste planning system and DTi's review of renewable energy obligations are ideal opportunities to do this. Failure to support energy from waste isn't just a matter of missing EU waste targets – it's a serious burning issue. It's what we need to do after recycling. It should be part of our national response to climate change.