

1 September 2023

Dear Secretary of State,

As the waste disposal authority for more than two million north Londoners, we are growing increasingly concerned by the rising popularity of single-use vapes. These unnecessary and unsustainable products are contributing to the fastest growing waste stream in the UK, destroying vital resources and polluting our planet. That is why we are joining the growing number of voices calling for them to be banned on environmental grounds.

Like you, we are aware that plastic is wreaking havoc on the environment and welcome your efforts to tackle this problem through your forthcoming ban on single-use items. However, vapes are even more toxic than cutlery, balloon sticks, containers, and plates. The nicotine they often contain is so damaging to the environment it has been used as a pesticide in the past.

An estimated 420,000* disposable vapes are bought in north London alone every single month. More than half** of these will end up littering our streets or being thrown in the bin - which is dangerous for rubbish collectors as the lithium batteries inside are a major fire risk. They can also damage vehicles and machinery, with taxpayers' money having to go towards repairs.

In fact, research by Material Focus found that more than 700 fires in bin lorries and recycling centres across the country have been caused by batteries being incorrectly dumped in the general waste.

Disposable vapes are also made from a small amount of rubber and copper – which is a critical material for our green transition, alongside lithium. These precious natural materials are extracted from the earth and are being depleted at an unsustainable rate, with the mining process generating greenhouse gases and requiring large amounts of water. The copper used in disposable vapes sold in north London each year could instead power more than 11*** vital electrical vehicle charging stations.

As the UK's second largest waste disposal authority, we encourage residents to either bring their vapes to one of our eight reuse and recycling centres or use a take-back scheme - but we are aware that these are inconsistent despite the legal obligations on retailers. At the very least, you need to ensure that the companies making money from single-use vapes are responsible for managing them once they become waste – such as by widening the scope of Extended Producer Responsibility.



The complex material composition of vapes means that they will always be logistically difficult, labour intensive and expensive to recycle – and we don't believe that the majority of taxpayers who try to do the right thing should bear these costs.

That is why we believe the simplest solution is to ban single-use vapes from manufacture and sale. This would show that you are committed to preserving resources and the environment for future generations, and share our desire to shift away from a dangerous throwaway culture.

Yours sincerely

Cllr Clyde Loakes
Chair, North London Waste Authority

*Research by Material Focus as part of an investigation with the Bureau of Investigative Journalism shows that nearly 14 million single-use vapes are bought in the UK each month. North London Waste Authority manages 3% of the UK's total waste.

** The research found that over 50% of single use vapes are thrown away, compared to 33% on average for all types of vapes.

***According to calculations produced by Material Focus and Financial Times, the amount of copper contained inside all single-use disposable vapes sold in the UK each year would provide enough copper to power over 370,000 home EV charging stations.

