Executive Summary

Non-productive polymer processing can generate a lot of waste. From wasted effort, time, materials and energy, to wasted labour, general consumables and even missed commercial opportunities. In UK industry, these waste costs amount to at least £15 billion annually. Equating to approximately 4.5% of total turnover.[1]

Implementing a Waste Minimisation programme is good for business. For an average manufacturer, 4.5% of total turnover could be comparable to:

- A company's total annual profits
- Half of a company's annual labour costs
- Five times a company's annual waste disposal costs.

This guidance document explores where and how these inefficiencies result in unnecessary loss in operational value, simple and effective ways to implement improvements, and how processors can realistically gain control over these overheads to protect turnover and profitability.

Waste Minimisation is also the right thing to do for sustainability and the environment and can be used by processors to demonstrate commitment towards:

- Environmental impact - ISO 14001 certification
- Energy management - ISO 50001 certification.

Plastic processors also need to stay mindful of legislative developments. For example, the transition to a single digital waste tracking system is planned for April 2026 when the UK, Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland governments are expected to mandate that each step in the waste chain is tracked digitally by a unique identifier.

Additionally, Simpler Recycling legislation in England came into effect in March 2025 for businesses with 10 or more employees. It requires businesses to separate dry recycling and food waste. Micro businesses with fewer than 10 employees have until 1 April 2027 to comply. All businesses must also separate plastic film for recycling by 1 April 2027.

Money saved from implementing a waste minimisation programme directly increases profitability. Even profitable businesses can benefit. For example:

7% gross margin - 1% waste costs = 14% increase in turnover. Company sales would need to increase by over 10% to produce a similar financial return.

1. Envirowise Environmental Best Practice Programme