

Guest Column: Combatting international catering waste is now or never

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In this guest column, Karen Mackenzie, Head of Membership at the Aviation Sustainability Forum and former Head of Global Supply Chain British Airways, discusses the Forum's focus on uniting the industry to combat international catering waste



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The Problem

Did you know that each year the equivalent of around 250 — 270 A380's of international catering waste (ICW) is incinerated around the world? Current legislation dictates that as soon as waste crosses international borders it is hazardous and must be incinerated or sent to a landfill. Globally, the burning and burying of cabin waste are contributing to increased CO2 emissions and creating devastating, long-term impacts on the environment. As passenger numbers continue to rise, this problem will only get worse and increasingly challenging to resolve.

Achieving Net Zero

In aviation we face a tougher journey than most in our effort to hit net zero targets. We see a lot of focus and work, quite rightly, to drive developments in sustainable aviation fuel (SAF). However, to achieve net zero in our sector, we also need to focus on cabin waste and look right across its entire and fragmented supply chain for new solutions. Product suppliers, caterers, airlines, airports, waste management companies — *all* of us have a key role to play in striving to be more sustainable. To reach net zero we simply cannot act alone.

We can no longer look exclusively at “our piece” — we must look at the whole community. As we are already looking upstream to find more sustainable materials, production processes and waste reduction practices we must also look downstream. If we see incineration or landfills — what was it all for?

This is a complex issue that involves many stakeholders and differing regulatory frameworks around the world. It may seem daunting at times. However, the supply chain can be reorganized to operate in a more sustainable way. [The Aviation Sustainability Forum](#) (ASF) is here to facilitate and support that essential change.

The Solution

The ASF is the alliance focused on working with the industry to transform the way international cabin waste is managed across the supply chain by embracing circularity. The ASF is convening the aviation supply chain and key stakeholders, building a collaborative coalition that is tasked with unlocking the right conditions for change.

We need to come together as an industry to recognise that a) this is a problem shared by all of us in the supply chain and b) the only way to really solve it is to work together.

At the ASF we believe that through the standardisation of materials onboard we can standardise waste management practices. We can then set about to prove that these practices result in safe waste that negates regulatory concerns and can be reused, recycled, biodegraded or composted — or how about used to create SAF — a truly circular economy!

The journey to net zero for ICW will be difficult — but as an industry, we are well-used to dealing with extreme challenges. We are fortunate in our sector to have great problem solvers, huge amounts of experience and expertise and, most importantly of all, the will to want to get there. We can and will do that — together.