



This column has been dormant for a couple of weeks as the Stokes household has packed up its belongings and moved house. We are still in the same soggy valley, but we have downsized to take account of advancing years.

A significant and sobering issue has been the amount of 'stuff' that we have had to shed to fit into the smaller – single storey – property. A brief environmental 'audit' shows that a significant amount has been reused. Two sturdy fellows came and removed an entire spare room that was surplus to requirements, for resale at bargain prices – principally to formerly homeless people who have finally been offered a home. Other, smaller stuff is recycled via the ubiquitous charity shop.

A further chunk – redundant electrical goods etc – has proved to be recyclable via enterprising sorts who recondition and/or rebuild such things. The remainder will be disposed of properly by the relevant authorities.

That is in contrast to the increasing problem of fly-tipping in the countryside and on farmland, revealed by the BBC programme *Countryfile* on Sunday. A representative of the National Farmers' Union stunned the presenter by stating that fly-tipping on farmland has increased by over 60% over the past 12 months. The reason for the massive increase? Success in driving fly-tippers away from urban and suburban areas and off public land.

What is perhaps even more disturbing, though, is the type of waste and who is doing what to dump it. The man from Defra showed a nasty mix of chemicals that had been poisoning fish and a huge mass of the stuff disguised as hay bales. What is maybe thought of as a nuisance perpetrated by individuals with some furniture to lose is in fact organised crime on an industrial scale.

- Following on from the report from the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, a symposium on the issue was held in Cardiff, organised by the Welsh Government and sponsored by its Minister for Natural Resources Alun Davies. The release issued by the Welsh Government proudly boasted: “We take the science seriously in tackling climate change, says Minister.”

It certainly seems that Wales is more in tune with those who are desperate to see some kind of action to protect the environment. However, Mr Davies did rather blot his copy book.

Speaking at the event the Minister said: “As the IPCC Fifth Assessment report has concluded, now is the time to build on what we have achieved to date and take real action on climate change across all levels of government.”

No, Mr Davies; now is not the time to take real action on climate change – years ago was the time to take real action on climate change, instead of just talking about it.

- Figures released today (7 Nov) by WRAP show that the average UK household still wastes around £60 worth of food per month, amounting to a waste mountain of 4.2 million tonnes nationally. The good news is that the figure is down by about 21% from the original report in 2007. It still represents a breathtaking lack of awareness of how to buy and store food. Many people blame the ‘buy one, get one free’ type of offers in supermarkets – that is patently shifting the blame. The fact is most food is storable in a deep freeze if people could be bothered splitting and freezing it.

A more insidious problem has been the ‘sell-by’ dates. Many people confuse them with ‘use-by’ dates, which should be respected. Fortunately there has been a sufficiently loud controversy around the issue, including a report by the BBC on *Five expired foods you can still eat*, to wake people up to the difference.

**Chris Stokes**