

# Let's Skip "The Tip"



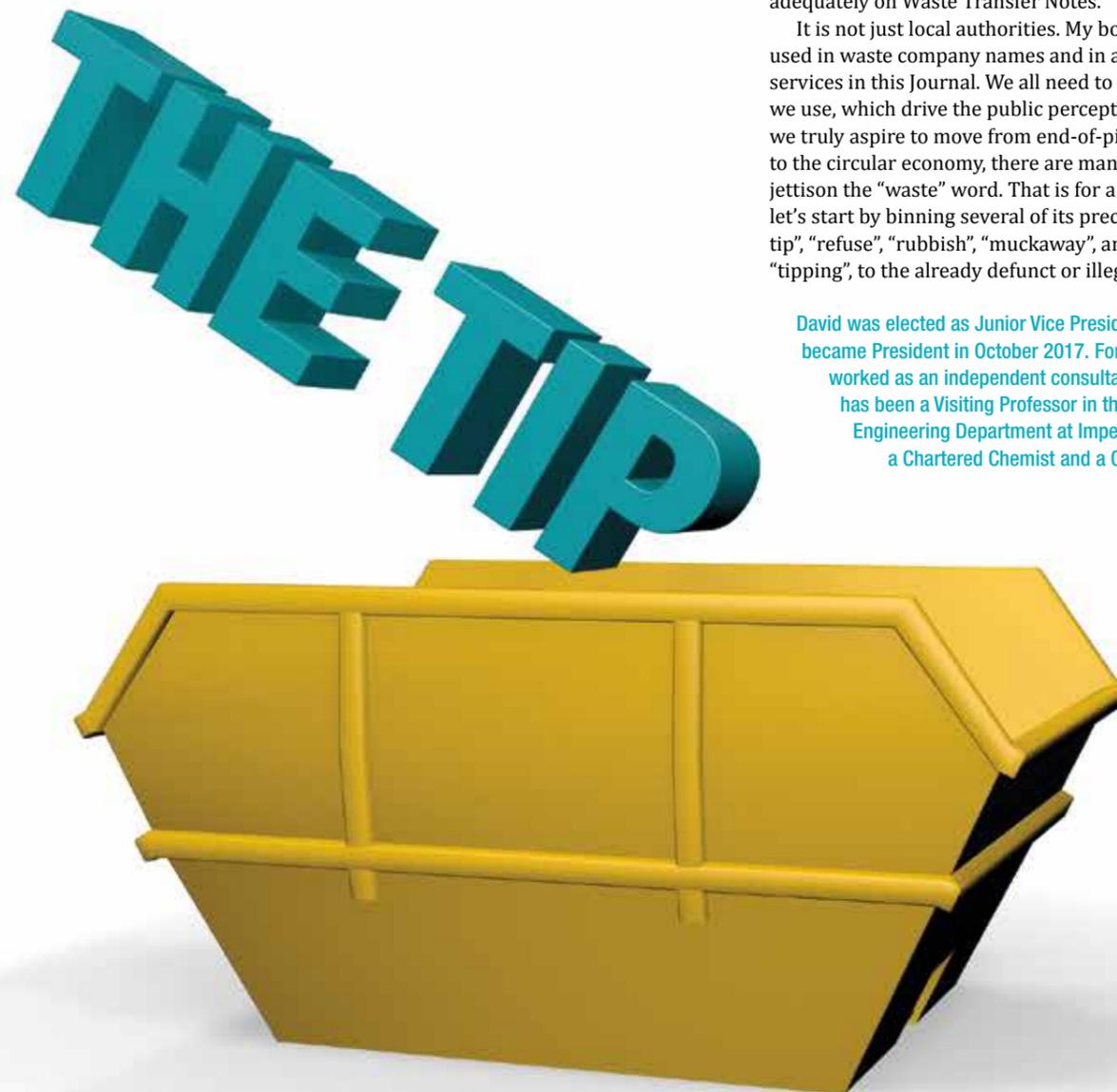
CIWM President, **Professor David Wilson MBE**, says terms such as "the tip", "rubbish", "refuse" and arguably "tipping", have no place in the vocabulary of the professional waste and resource manager

When I was a kid, dealing with our household refuse was simple. All the rubbish went into the dustbin, which was collected by the binmen every week, and taken to be tipped at the local council dump – the one we drove past regularly was always on fire, which seemed to me very exciting.

I started work at the old Harwell Laboratory in summer 1974, just as the Control of Pollution Act (CoPA) was enacted, ending the era of uncontrolled dumping. Looking back through the library at CIWM HQ, it is clear that CoPA also marked a conscious change in our vocabulary. The "Sumner Report", published in 1971 and on which CoPA was based, was entitled "Refuse Disposal" and included a chapter on "Controlled Tipping of Refuse". But CoPA talks instead about the disposal of "controlled waste" rather than "refuse" or "rubbish", and the subsequent implementing regulations and guidelines ("Waste Management Papers", aka "the little red books") used the term "landfill" rather than "controlled tipping".

When environmental standards are upgraded, one of the most difficult things to do is to convince the public that things have really changed. So, to me as a new young thing in waste management in the 1970s and 1980s, being careful in our use of language was an integral part of the new professionalism of the sector. As a consultant, I have many times over the years edited reports to ensure that "dump" or "dumping" is only used when referring to uncontrolled and/or illegal disposal. In the UK, "dumping" should be synonymous with waste crime, and in developing countries, there is a clear goal to "eliminate uncontrolled dumping and burning".

So far, hopefully uncontroversial. But to me we need to go further: other pre-modern terms such as "the tip", and indeed "rubbish", "refuse" and arguably "tipping", have no place in the vocabulary of the professional waste and resource manager. We talk a lot about behaviour change, and we have achieved huge strides in raising average recycling rates across the UK from six percent to 46 percent in just 20 years. But it is difficult to persuade the public to take seriously their personal responsibility to "reduce, reuse, recycle" if local councils persist in using loose language. A cursory search revealed a webpage titled "Local tips (recycling centres)",



which continued, "There are two rubbish tips near XXXX Borough". This is unacceptable and counter-productive – at least one of these costs millions to build – if we persist in calling such new facilities the "local tip", how do we expect to get public support and planning permission?

OK, perhaps it is necessary to redirect web searches for "refuse tip" or "rubbish dump" to the properly worded webpages. Clearly, many local authorities feel the need to explain a webpage title "The Recycling Centre" by adding "The Tip"; but to me the archaic usage should be in quotation marks and not used otherwise on the webpage unless to explain that it is a term no longer in use; and there should be an agreed deadline by which such usage will stop.

I would like to include "tipping" on my hit list, restricting its use to "fly-tipping", synonymous with uncontrolled disposal and waste crime. But I accept that "tipper trucks" are still sold, and "tipping" is what they do. But context is important – so, for example, "tipping asbestos" simply does not sound professional. The December Journal proposed another candidate: "muckaway", describing construction and demolition wastes and/or their removal. Here the issue is not only changing the mind-set of waste generators and contractors, it is also legal compliance by describing wastes adequately on Waste Transfer Notes.

It is not just local authorities. My bogey words are still used in waste company names and in adverts for professional services in this Journal. We all need to be careful in the words we use, which drive the public perception of our industry. If we truly aspire to move from end-of-pipe waste management to the circular economy, there are many who would like to jettison the "waste" word. That is for a future debate, but let's start by binning several of its precursors, adding "the tip", "refuse", "rubbish", "muckaway", and in many contexts "tipping", to the already defunct or illegal "dump". ■

David was elected as Junior Vice President of CIWM in 2015, and became President in October 2017. For the last 10 years, he has worked as an independent consultant and, since 2000, David has been a Visiting Professor in the Civil and Environmental Engineering Department at Imperial College London. He is a Chartered Chemist and a Chartered Waste Manager.