ENVIRONMENT SEMINAR 2026 | SESSION REPORT

Talking Rubbish: Reaching consumers with clarity and humour

5 November 2026 | Stationers' Hall, London

James Piper: Talking Rubbish



James Piper is co-owner of Ecosurety, a published author, and the creator and co-host of the UK's number one recycling podcast, Talking Rubbish. Together with co-host Robbie Staniforth, the pair use accessible explanations, stories and humour to discuss packaging, recycling and waste.

Robbie Staniforth: Talking Rubbish



In addition to being the co-host of the award-winning podcast, Talking Rubbish, Robbie Staniforth is an award-winning packaging and recycling expert, a UK government advisor, and director and chief policy and impact officer at Ecosurety.

KEY POINTS

- The presenters reported 15 million social media views and a growing public audience.
- They advocated curiosity, accuracy and encouragement over guilt and jargon.
- Public discussion prompted Morrisons to correct recycling artwork rapidly.
- Misused recycling statistics can erode trust and participation.

FULL SESSION REPORT

The packaging industry must communicate complex environmental subjects to consumers more effectively, replacing jargon, confusing statistics and negative messaging with accessible explanation, storytelling and evidence. That was the message from Robbie Staniforth and James Piper, who returned to the FPA Environment Seminar with their award-winning Talking Rubbish podcast.

Specialist subjects can reach mainstream audiences

The presenters described the growth of a weekly podcast covering everyday recycling questions alongside more technical discussions about EPR, deposit return, collection systems and waste policy. They reported 15 million social media views and increasing engagement from listeners with no professional connection to the packaging sector.

They also discussed winning two British Podcast Awards in October, including gold in the education category. Rather than focusing purely on the accolades, they used these developments to demonstrate that technical environmental subjects can attract wider public interest when explained in an engaging way.

Translate the numbers into something understandable

A recurring lesson was to make information meaningful to a non-specialist audience. The pair urged communicators to avoid assuming that people understand the acronyms, material classifications or recycling processes familiar to industry professionals.

Piper illustrated the point by calculating illustrative EPR packaging costs for different ways of selling baked beans. His deliberately unconventional comparison per thousand beans enabled audiences to visualise the cost differences between formats that would otherwise be described in pounds per tonne. He also considered EPR fees as a percentage of retail selling prices to put the figures into consumer context.

Positive communication can change packaging

The presenters described a practical example involving a Morrisons tomato paste jar labelled ‘do not recycle’. After the podcast raised the issue, the retailer's packaging team responded and, according to the presenters, updated the artwork within eight days. The accompanying social media video attracted more than one million views.

They emphasised that the result emerged from a constructive and encouraging approach rather than prolonged criticism. Public audiences could welcome brands acknowledging a mistake and acting quickly, providing a reputational incentive for improvements.

The risk from misleading recycling statistics

Staniforth and Piper also challenged the use of statistics without appropriate context. They highlighted the differences between recycling figures calculated by item count and by material weight, the misuse of global rates to describe local recycling systems and the risk of presenting exported material as though export automatically meant no recycling occurred.

Their concern was not to dismiss legitimate criticism of waste infrastructure but to avoid creating the impression that separating materials is pointless. They described sceptical reactions to conventional recycling, often accompanied by surprisingly protective attitudes towards deposit return arrangements, where consumers can see a direct connection between returning a container and reclaiming a deposit.

Build trust by correcting mistakes

The podcast includes a regular additions-and-corrections feature. The presenters argued that honesty about errors is essential when discussing complex technical subjects, and that audiences are more likely to trust communicators who are transparent rather than falsely certain.

Their overall message was that good communication enables positive action. For the foodservice packaging sector, better consumer understanding complements improvements to design, collection and infrastructure; it is a necessary part of making the circular economy work in practice.

SESSION PHOTOGRAPHY





PRESENTATION MATERIALS

Download a PDF of the presentation slides here

Source and publication note

This session report is intended to be an overview and is not a verbatim transcript.