



Waste Management in New Zealand – A Decade of Progress

“If we are to give New Zealanders the environment they expect and deserve then a sound waste management programme has to be high on our list of priorities. Management of New Zealand’s waste is not just an abstract environmental issue: it can affect where we live, work and play. Managing our waste in a sustainable and responsible way is a social and economic imperative. We owe it to ourselves and to future generations to get it right.”

Barry Carbon, CEO, Ministry for the Environment

The New Zealand Waste Strategy was published in March 2002. It is a long term strategy to help reduce waste, recover resources and better manage residual waste in New Zealand. It covers solid, liquid, gaseous and hazardous waste. The Ministry for the Environment prepared the strategy in partnership with Local Government New Zealand.

This year, the Ministry for the Environment has reported on the progress on waste management over the past 10 years. This was part of the work done for the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) review. This information sheet provides some summary information on that report. It also describes how the goals of the New Zealand Waste Strategy contribute towards a better waste management programme for New Zealanders.

THE NEW ZEALAND WASTE STRATEGY

In partnership with Local Government New Zealand, the Ministry for the Environment launched the New Zealand Waste Strategy in March 2002. The Strategy is a long term approach to reduce waste, improve recycling and re-use of waste materials, and better manage residual waste in New Zealand. It sets the overarching strategic direction for the minimisation and management of solid, liquid, gaseous and hazardous wastes in this country.

The Waste Strategy identifies a number of principles, policies and action programmes to achieve the vision towards zero waste and a sustainable New Zealand. It seeks win-win solutions that meet society’s need for environmental protection, social well-being and economic development.

The Strategy has three core goals:

- to lower the social costs and risks of waste
- to reduce the damage to the environment from waste generation and disposal
- to increase economic benefit by more efficient use of materials.

It achieves these goals through four action programmes in the areas of:

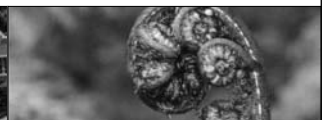
- institutions and legislation
- waste reduction and materials efficiency
- information and communication
- standards and guidelines.

The Strategy also includes 30 national targets for dealing with priority waste issues in New Zealand. A *Review of Targets in the New Zealand Waste Strategy* was undertaken in February 2004. The next review of the Strategy is scheduled for the end of 2006.

TAKING ACTION: STRENGTHENING THE LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

In the past 10 years there have been a number of significant achievements in strengthening the legislative framework for waste management and minimisation including:

- provisions in the Resource Management Act 1991 relating to the licensing, management and location of waste treatment facilities



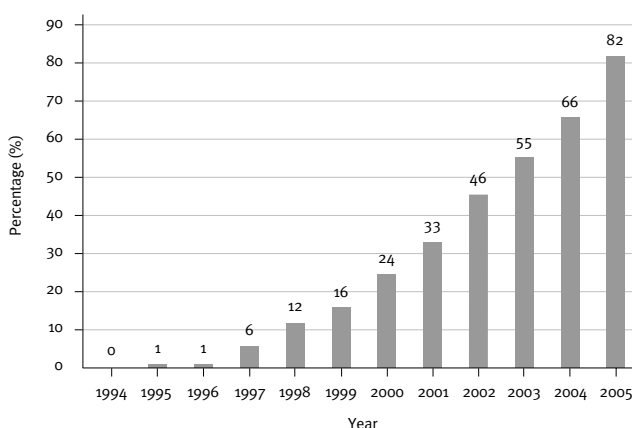
- provisions in the Local Government Act 2002 relating to waste management planning which:
 - require all territorial authorities to have waste management plans in place by June 2005
 - enable local authorities to enact bylaws relating to their roles and responsibilities for waste management and the costs of carrying out these functions
- proposed amendments to the Hazardous Substances and New Organisms Act to enable the development of ‘group standards’ to control groups of hazardous substances (including, potentially, waste hazardous substances)
- 14 national environmental standards delivered under the Resource Management Act 1991. These standards include:
 - a ban on the burning of waste at landfills
 - a ban on the open-air burning of oil, tyres and coated wire
 - a ban on open-air burning of bitumen
 - a ban on any new high temperature hazardous waste incinerators
 - the requirement for incinerators at schools and hospitals to obtain resource consent by 2006
- ratification of the Stockholm Convention, and a national programme to implement New Zealand’s commitments to safely dispose of unwanted persistent organic pollutants
- consultation on a draft product stewardship policy, underpinned by legislation, for managing ‘special wastes’ (wastes which are particularly hard to manage or dispose of).

TAKING ACTION: SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS AT THE REGIONAL AND LOCAL LEVEL

Much of the responsibility for waste management sits with local government. There has been considerable progress in waste management at the local level, particularly where regional coordination has occurred.

Councils have shown good progress in developing waste management plans, as indicated in Figure 1 below.

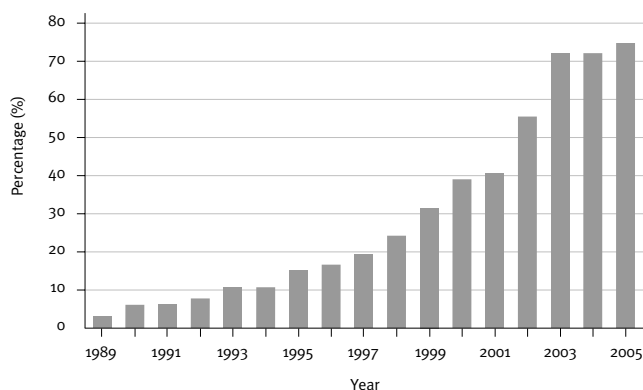
Figure 1: Percentage of councils with waste management plans



Good progress has also been made on the increased access to and demand for recycling facilities. Over 95 percent of New Zealanders now have access to recycling facilities for glass, paper, tins, cans and plastics (grades 1 and 2).

Figure 2 below shows how kerbside recycling services have increased.

Figure 2: Percentage of councils with a kerbside recycling service



TAKING ACTION: IMPROVED WASTE REDUCTION AND WASTE MINIMISATION

Effective policy for waste reduction and materials efficiency is a core goal of the New Zealand Waste Strategy.

Achievements in recent years include:

- development of a new Packaging Accord to reduce packaging content and improve recycling
- development of *Guidelines for the safe application of biosolids to land in New Zealand* to remove barriers to the use of biosolids as fertilisers and soil conditioners
- establishment of *Tyre Track*, a scheme for tracking used tyres and a first step towards a product stewardship scheme covering used tyres
- establishment of Govt³, a whole of government scheme that aims to reduce the environmental impact of government agencies, and help government provide leadership on reducing waste
- support for Environmental Choice New Zealand, an environmental labelling programme to encourage greater consumer purchase of products with low environmental impact
- establishment of a series of web-based local waste exchanges whereby wastes can be exchanged or traded among businesses
- development of a New Zealand standard for the production of organic compost to support the diversion of organic material from landfills
- partnerships with industry to develop schemes to take back unwanted agricultural containers, silage wrap and electronic waste. Industry-led take-back schemes for some paints and mobile phones are also in operation.

PRODUCT STEWARDSHIP SCHEMES

Product stewardship is a tool with the potential to greatly improve how we deal with waste. It encourages producers, brand owners, importers and consumers to help manage the environmental effects of products throughout their life cycle.

The Ministry for the Environment is exploring the development of a formal product stewardship policy supported by legislation. A discussion document was released in July 2005 for public consultation. It sets out product stewardship options to deal with wastes that are particularly hard to manage or dispose of (such as used oil, end-of-life vehicles, batteries and electronic goods). A number of these wastes are also classified as hazardous wastes.

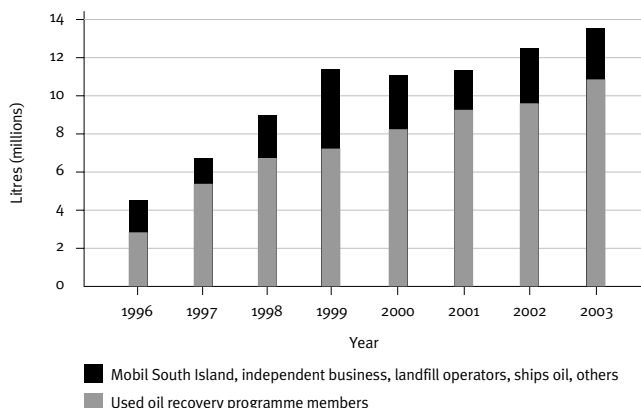
The discussion document recognised that a number of successful, voluntary industry-led product stewardship schemes already exist (such as take-back schemes of cellphones and IT equipment by major telecommunications companies). In some instances, all organisations working in an industry agree to work together to take responsibility for the waste their products generate. In other cases, some businesses may choose to stay outside of the scheme, and 'free ride' on schemes designed, implemented and funded by others.

The Ministry for the Environment's preferred option for a formal product stewardship policy is one that encourages voluntary industry-led schemes, with legislation as a backstop for 'free-riders' only if required. The final shape of any product stewardship policy and its adoption by government will be determined after consultation.

Examples of successful voluntary industry-led product stewardship schemes are used oil collection programmes. These programmes have existed since 1996. They are supported by Shell New Zealand, BP Oil New Zealand, Caltex New Zealand, Mobil Oil New Zealand and Valvoline New Zealand. An estimated 30 million litres of oil are generated in New Zealand every year. Over 65 percent of this is recovered and as the figure below shows, nearly 15 million litres of it is transported to Holcim New Zealand Limited in Westport, where it is re-used as a fuel in the manufacture of cement.



Figure 3: Used oil and ships oil deliveries to Holcim, Westport



TAKING ACTION: HAZARDOUS WASTE MANAGEMENT

Another important feature of the New Zealand Waste Strategy is the reduction and safe management of hazardous wastes. A waste is considered hazardous if it poses a risk to people or the environment if it is not properly managed, stored and disposed of. While hazardous wastes are controlled by a number of different pieces of legislation and agencies at the local and national level, the Ministry for the Environment has led work towards a national hazardous wastes policy with the aim of putting in place a policy framework by the end of 2005.

A number of elements of the policy framework are already in place including:

- guidelines for the Management of Hazardous Waste
- hazardous substances and land transport (dangerous goods) regulations
- the *Liquid and Hazardous Waste Code of Practice* (and an associated waste tracking system)
- controls (eg, discharges) under the Resource Management Act
- national environmental standards covering dioxins and emissions of other toxins
- the *New Zealand Waste List*, which serves as the basis for record-keeping for waste, including hazardous wastes
- *Landfill Waste Acceptance Criteria*, which provide a nationally consistent approach to the disposal of waste to landfills (including hazardous waste)

- *Model Trade Waste Bylaw*, which helps local government control the discharge of waste (including hazardous waste) to the wastewater system
- a partnership with regional councils to collect and safely dispose of New Zealand's backlog of unused or unwanted agricultural chemicals
- ongoing financial support for the remediation of contaminated sites in New Zealand.

TAKING ACTION: IMPROVING LANDFILL OPERATIONS

Although the New Zealand Waste Strategy puts emphasis on waste reduction and waste minimisation, there will always be a certain amount of residual waste to contain and manage. Improving the management of landfills across the country has been a key focus since the release of the New Zealand Waste Strategy. The number of landfills operating in New Zealand has declined dramatically from over 300 in 1995 to around 90 currently. Predictions are that there will be less than 50 landfill operations in New Zealand by 2010.

The landfills that do remain are increasingly better designed and operated to minimise the potential impacts on the wider environment. Guidance on the design and operation of landfills produced by the Ministry for the Environment is now routinely used in resource consents to ensure the design and operation of landfills is of an adequate standard.

In addition, landfill operators have progressively introduced a regime of 'user pays' to cover the full cost of landfill disposal. These initiatives have resulted in opportunities for waste diversion and waste recovery.