

WASTE... EVERYONE'S PROBLEM

The wealthier we get, the more we waste. In the last hundred years our material wealth was dramatically improved by thousands of new technologies – exciting consumer goods; electricity and clean water in our homes, and sewage flushed away; more intensive food production; faster transport; better housing.

But all this came at a cost. Almost every time we do something that uses materials and energy – from mining to cooking dinner – we create waste, which is then dumped into our environment.

People are living things, and the earth is our life support system. So putting waste out for collection or flushing it away isn't the answer. *Away* is the landfill in someone else's neighbourhood; the wastewater treatment plant in someone else's harbour. With waste, there is no *away*. If we keep polluting our environment with waste it will eventually cease to support us.



The Living Earth Company takes 72,000 tonnes of garden and abattoir wastes from landfills in Auckland, Christchurch and Wellington to turn into valuable compost for gardens and farms. This saves more than half a million cubic metres of landfill space every year. In Wellington, the company makes compost from garden waste mixed with biosolids recovered from the council's wastewater treatment plant. The finished product must meet stringent standards for application to land.



Ministry for the
Environment
Manatū Mō Te Taiao



The New Zealand Waste Strategy at a glance

Towards zero waste and a sustainable New Zealand

What is the strategy expected to achieve?

The strategy sets specific, practical targets for dealing with various waste streams. Some key targets relate to:

- **Re-using and recycling high-volume wastes** (eg, garden wastes, sewage sludge, and building and demolition wastes).
- **Minimising and managing hazardous wastes** (eg, organochlorines¹, contaminated sites, and hazardous components in business waste).
- **Upgrading waste disposal facilities** (eg, closing or upgrading substandard landfills and wastewater treatment plants).
- **Charging waste generators the true environmental cost of treatment and disposal** (eg, charging full cost at landfills).

Because we don't have enough information about our waste, these targets are provisional. The Ministry for the Environment will work with local authorities on guidelines for achieving them, and they will be reviewed in 2003.

What can we all do about waste?

Progress *towards zero waste and a sustainable New Zealand* lies in all our hands.

We can play our part by:

- recognising that we all generate waste
- taking responsibility for our own waste
- learning how we can reduce our waste
- understanding the true cost of waste.



Christchurch City Council set up the **Recovered Materials Foundation** to develop secure local markets for recycled materials. The foundation works with local businesses to incorporate recycled materials in new or existing products. One of its recent successes is the Supershed. Staff repair and refurbish any goods from council recycling centres that can be re-used, including furniture, bicycles and computers. The Supershed is doing a roaring trade.

¹ Organochlorines are chemicals that contain carbon and chlorine atoms joined together. Some organochlorines are persistent and present a risk to the environment and human health. Examples include dioxin and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs).

If you would like to know more about the strategy contact the Ministry for the Environment by phoning (04) 917 7400 or writing to us at PO Box 10-362 Wellington.

This document, and a full copy of the strategy, is available on the Ministry for the Environment's website: www.mfe.govt.nz

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What is the New Zealand Waste Strategy?

A vision *and* an action plan for reducing and better managing waste – a strategy for a society that values its environment and resources, and wants to hand them on intact to its children and grandchildren.

The *New Zealand Waste Strategy* has been put together by the Ministry for the Environment and *Local Government New Zealand*, in consultation with others who understand our waste problem and know we must act now to address it.

This pamphlet outlines what's in the detailed strategy. It's been distributed in the belief that New Zealanders care about protecting their environment, now and for the future, want to know what's being done about it, and what we can do to help.

Some facts about waste

Every year:

- 3.4 million tonnes of waste ends up in landfills
- 500 billion litres of sewage are fed into 250 wastewater treatment plants, generating up to one million tonnes of sludge
- 13,000 tonnes of medical waste is incinerated.

And that's not counting unofficial or illegal disposal, or waste that's difficult to keep track of.

- The quantity of waste per person dumped every year in Auckland has increased by almost 75 percent since 1983.
- About 93 percent of the materials we use are thrown away during production.
- About 80 percent of what we produce is thrown away after one use.

Why does waste matter?

Waste is bad for our health, bad for the environment and bad for the economy.

We all pay for waste – directly, when we dispose of it; indirectly, when we waste resources. New Zealand has made some progress in re-using waste products. But the fact that there's so much waste to re-use is a sign we're not using resources efficiently. Making and delivering what we need without creating so much waste is the best way of saving our money and our environment.

New Zealand's waste problem is big, and getting bigger. We have to reverse that trend. *The New Zealand Waste Strategy* sets in place a plan for doing this.

What is waste?

Anything unwanted, unvalued and thrown away by its owner, such as:

- paper, plastic, glass, metals and household appliances
- kitchen waste, garden waste, livestock wastes and industrial food processing waste
- car tyres, car bodies, used motor oil and batteries
- paint, household chemicals and agrichemicals
- building and demolition waste
- mine and quarrying tailings
- medical waste
- sewage
- industrial and commercial waste
- gases and particles from open fires, incinerators, agricultural and industrial processes, and vehicles.

The New Zealand Waste Strategy deals with most, but not all wastes. Ozone-depleting gases, vehicle exhaust and animal wastes come under separate programmes.

What is sustainable living?

Unless we minimise waste and learn to manage it better, we can't live sustainably.

Sustainable living is about meeting our own needs without compromising those of future generations. It means respecting the environment, and finding ways to break the link between wealth generation and waste, production and environmental degradation.

To reduce waste we must change the way we think about our environment. Our air, land and water are too valuable to squander as dumps, and we have no right to do so.

What is new about this strategy?

- It's comprehensive - covering solid, liquid and gaseous wastes, and dealing with waste from generation to disposal.
- It sets out to solve the waste problem - rather than just transferring it to another place or another person.
- It takes a preventive approach - changing the current emphasis on *end of pipe* management, which focuses on waste disposal, to focus on waste prevention.
- It promotes materials and resource efficiency - at every stage of production and consumption.

What are the strategy's guiding principles?

- **Global citizenship** - The effects of our waste aren't confined to our own backyard. We must take responsibility for its global consequences.
- **Kaitiakitanga/stewardship** - We're all responsible for looking after our environment. Maori believe all living things are related and that kaitiaki, or stewards, are obliged to maintain the life-sustaining capacity of the environment for present and future generations.
- **Extended producer responsibility** - Those who make goods and deliver services should bear some responsibility for them and any waste they produce, throughout a product's entire life-cycle.
- **Full-cost pricing** - The environmental effects of making, distributing, using and disposing of goods and services must be properly costed and charged where they occur.
- **Life-cycle principle** - Things should be designed, made and managed so all their environmental effects are accounted for and minimised, until the end of their lives.
- **Precautionary principle** - lack of scientific certainty must never be used as a reason for ignoring serious environmental risk.



Kaitaia's Community Business and Environment Centre runs waste and recycling services for the Far North District Council. It diverts around 65 percent of the community's waste from landfill, by recycling and re-use, and at two-thirds of the cost of sending it to landfill.



Fisher & Paykel's whiteware take-back scheme processes around 25,000 used appliances a year. Around 1,600 tonnes of aluminium, stainless steel, copper, steel, plastics, packaging, electric cable, compressors, glass and circuit boards are recovered for reuse or recycling. Packaging is the biggest source of recovered material – 75,000 pieces per year – with some packaging re-usable up to four times. With sales of recyclable materials, and internal savings from the re-use of packaging material, the take-back centre is making a small profit, with revenue in 2000 topping \$500,000.

Where do we start?

We can't do everything immediately, so the strategy prioritises where we should put our energy and resources according to:

- **Volume and harm** - deal with wastes that pose the biggest environmental and social risks because of their large volumes or high toxicity.
- **Achievability** - focus on what we can realistically achieve.
- **Public concern** - make sure plans are in step with community views.
- **Cost effectiveness** - take measures that give the best value for money.

What are the strategy's action programmes?

- **Institutions and legislation** - ensuring we have a sound legal framework for waste minimisation and management, with clear roles for central, regional and local government; ensuring good planning, and compliance with international conventions.
- **Waste reduction and materials efficiency** - developing tools and techniques to reduce waste and maximise re-use, recycling and recovery; removing obstacles to the use of recovered materials, and developing economic incentives to change wasteful behaviour.
- **Information and communication** - collecting the right information on waste minimisation and management; enhancing community understanding of waste issues, and encouraging individual efforts to reduce waste.
- **Standards and guidelines** - setting consistently high environmental performance standards for waste treatment and disposal, transport and storage; having all waste facilities account for the full cost of their operation and charge accordingly.