



LOCAL AUTHORITY SOLID WASTE REDUCTION INITIATIVES

Government policy on solid waste reduction since 1989 has relied on voluntary measures by 'waste generators' at all levels of the economy, and within this policy framework local authorities have an important role to play in the way they manage wastes locally. Accordingly, the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment investigated local authority waste reduction initiatives, focusing on four case studies. This pamphlet summarises the findings.

Office of the
PARLIAMENTARY COMMISSIONER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT
Te Kaitiaki Taiao a Te Whare Pāremata



SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Key recommendations have been italicised, and their recipients noted in bold type.

Integrated Waste Management

- Truly integrated waste management requires attention to five key components. In order of importance these 'five Rs' are: Reduce, Reuse, Recover, Recycle, and treat and dispose of Residue.
- In the past, local authorities have focused almost exclusively on the residue disposal end of integrated waste management. Emphasis now needs to be placed on a total waste reduction programme, and some councils are making positive efforts in this regard.
- Local authorities do not question the need to pay for collection and disposal of refuse, but regard waste reduction initiatives as 'luxuries' which must 'pay for themselves' even though the market does not presently value the social and environmental benefits.
- Where efforts have been made to reduce waste, both the public and local authorities tend to focus on post-consumer recycling. Again, this is only one aspect of integrated waste management.
- Waste production by manufacturers must also be reduced at source. ***The Minister for the Environment*** needs to continue and enhance the Cleaner Production programme, ensuring active industry-wide promotion.

Landfill Valuation

- Replacement landfills are becoming more expensive and harder to find. Disposal space needs to be treated as a valuable community asset. Valuing a landfill only by past expenditure does not value the capacity of the landfill and hence cannot allow for the increased value of that capacity over time.
- Local authority calculation of landfill assets is inadequate, making landfill disposal look artificially cheap and discouraging waste reduction. Until the true costs and benefits of disposal to landfill are part of the equation, waste reduction programmes will appear more expensive than disposal.
- ***Local authorities*** need to include in landfill valuation:
 - land values;
 - the value of landfill space;
 - the cost of managing environmental effects; and,
 - aftercare for closed landfills (including leachate and methane emission control).
- The true value to the community of savings in landfill volume capacity is the replacement cost, not the present cost. ***Local authorities*** which are within the planning horizon (five to seven years) of their next landfill should be reflecting future costs in their present disposal costs.
- ***The Minister for the Environment*** needs to develop guidelines for valuation of landfill assets over time, with particular emphasis on means of including long-term and environmental costs and benefits.

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- A major restraint on waste reduction is low charges which councils levy for waste management, particularly landfill charges. Most charges are still subsidised by rates.
 - Despite fears to the contrary, increased 'generator pays' landfill and collection fees have not led to significant increases in illegal tipping.
 - **Local authorities** should introduce or improve local 'generator pays' waste management charges, in consultation with the community, making it very clear to the public:
 - what services are paid for;
 - that waste management costings include all collection, disposal, recycling and composting services, accurate valuation of landfill space, anticipation of future landfill replacement and aftercare costs;
 - that reduction in waste is directly related to reduction in charges,
 - that the community has access to effective waste reduction measures such as convenient recycling stations and collections, home composting, and municipal composting schemes; and,
 - what social and environmental benefits are expected.
 - **Local authorities** need to ensure that all waste management service contracts actively support waste reduction and do not contain financial incentives to maintain or increase the amount of waste taken to landfill.

'Generator Pays' Incentives

- A significant barrier to greater waste reduction is the inadequacy of markets for recyclables. The market for recyclables does not credit long term and environmental benefits, and this is one reason why recycling cannot be made to 'pay for itself'.
- Government policy has been to encourage industry to voluntarily impose 'generator pays' measures to pay some of the waste management costs they impose on the community by their production, packaging and distribution choices. This policy has had little effect to date.
- Until such time as government and industry take more effective action to influence 'macroeconomic' signals, local authorities and consumers can still promote demand for reusable and recycled products, find alternative uses for waste, and lobby industry for better consumer choices.
- **Local authorities** need to purchase recycled materials for council services to help encourage recycling markets, with particular emphasis on paper, plastic and lubricating oil. Until larger markets are developed through such action, this will often represent some additional cost.

Markets for Recycling

Effective Waste Reduction

- A significant reduction (15% to 60%) of waste going to local landfills cannot be achieved without diversion of waste paper and green wastes. At the present time markets for paper recycling are limited, but green wastes can be composted (home composting and larger scale shredder/windrow operations).
- **Local authorities** need to encourage composting of green wastes and compare set-up costs (such as shredding machinery or home composting instruction) against long-term landfill space savings.
- **The Minister for the Environment** needs to urgently develop guidelines for local authorities on siting and consent conditions for large-scale green waste composting operations, with particular attention to good management practice and odour and leachate control.
- **Local authorities** need to measure the effects of their waste reduction programmes, and publicise the results.

Information and Public Participation

- **Local authorities** need to better inform the public about costs and expected benefits of waste disposal and waste reduction programmes, and provide opportunities for the public to be part of decision-making on waste management programmes.
- **Local authorities** need to better inform the public about local waste reduction options and explain matters which are out of a council's control (for example, national recycling markets, industry choices in packaging).

Legislation

- Under existing legislation councils have adequate mandate and powers to encourage waste reduction initiatives at all stages of the waste hierarchy in their communities. However, for the sake of clarity the Local Government Act 1974 needs to be updated.
- **The Minister of Internal Affairs, in consultation with the Minister for the Environment**, needs to update the Local Government Act 1974 to explicitly refer to the 'five Rs' of integrated waste management.

These findings are taken from a full report which contains further details, including:

- findings from four case studies: Dunedin City Council, Timaru District Council, Lower Hutt City Council, and Masterton District Council;
- a summary of relevant legislation;
- a discussion on accurate costing of waste management services; and,
- conclusions and recommendations.

The full report is available on request from:

The Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment
PO Box 10-241
Wellington (Telephone (04) 471-1669).

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