

schools



Did you know?

- Waste is considered to be a material left over or no longer in use.
- It can be a liquid or solid, and made from synthetic or natural material.
- People tend to discard materials that are perceived to have little or no value.
- A material becomes waste because it is not socially acceptable, or it is not economically and environmentally viable for it to be recycled or re-used.

About waste

Many people often refer to waste as rubbish. Rubbish is something that we all produce as part of everyday living, and often don't think much about; as the saying goes "out of sight, out of mind". We simply put our rubbish bin on the kerbside every week, and the council arranges for someone to take it away. But as we are beginning to realise and experience, waste doesn't really go away. In fact, waste disposal has become a major environmental and economic concern.

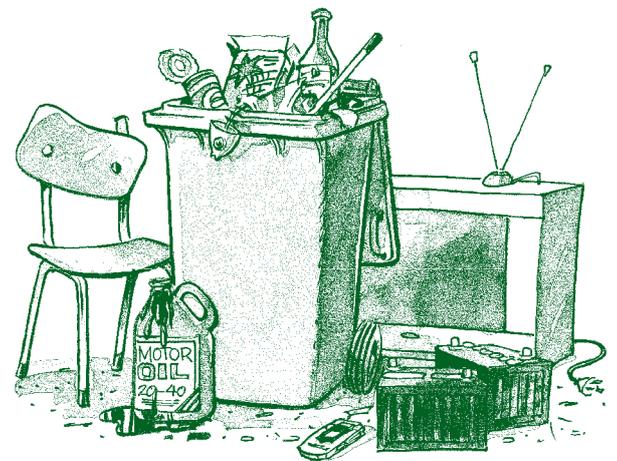
Not only are we producing more waste than we used to, but our population is also growing and we are buying/consuming more and more. As urban areas expand, suitable landfill sites are becoming more difficult to find due to concerns about smell, litter, pollution, pests and the reduced value of residents' homes – no one wants to live near a landfill! Councils in the Perth region have combined into larger groups to share landfill sites, because it is difficult and expensive for individual councils to establish new ones.

As we continue to fill up existing landfill sites, we create the need to clear more land for new sites, which can further threaten remnant bushland and the flora and fauna living there. Other potential environmental problems from landfill include:

- the pollution of surface or groundwater by leachates (toxic liquid created from rain filtering through rubbish) in unlined landfills
- the release of greenhouse gases in the form of methane, which is 20 times stronger than carbon dioxide as a greenhouse gas, and remains in the atmosphere for 100 to 150 years
- the creation of nuisance odours and dust
- the release of pollutants into the atmosphere in the event of fire
- the distribution of 'wind blown waste' such as plastic bags that may find its way into waterways and neighbouring terrestrial sites.

Waste and landfill

In Western Australia over five million tonnes of municipal waste were generated during 2006-2007, and 33 per cent of this was diverted from landfill. This equates to approximately 700kg of waste being generated per person in WA, most of which is disposed of in landfill. The majority of municipal landfills in WA report a life expectancy of less than 10 years from 2007. Therefore our continued reliance on landfill as the principal means of dealing with waste in WA is imposing an environmental, social and economic liability on future generations.



The table below shows how much waste was generated in WA, and the percentage of weight diverted from landfill.

Material	Tonnes Generated	% of weight diverted
Paper and cardboard	489,000	47%
Plastic	105,000	17%
Glass	89,000	23%
Metal	573,000	87%
Organics	1,214,000	44%
Timber	130,000	8%
Concrete	2,220,000	17%
Rubber	8,000	63%
Textiles	20,000	9%
Other Waste	399,000	1%
Total	5,247,000	33%

Source: 2008 Hyder report.

For these reasons it is important that we minimise the amount of waste going to landfill by adopting the 3Rs: reduce, reuse and recycle. More information on how to do this can be found on the '3Rs' fact sheet.

Being Waste Wise about waste

What can we do to reduce waste going to landfill

Every household and school can reduce its impact on the environment by being Waste Wise. The steps to minimising waste are – *reduce* the amount of products and packaging we buy; *reuse* items instead of buying new or disposable ones; and *recycle* what is left whenever possible. We can also 'Shop Smart' and purchase items in bulk, choose reusable items with minimal packaging and buy products that have been made from recycled materials to improve the economic viability of recycling.

The largest proportion of the waste thrown out by WA households is organic waste such as garden and food waste. By reusing and recycling organic waste alone, most WA families and schools could cut their contribution to landfill by more than half! See the 'How to compost' fact sheet or the 'Worm farming in schools' fact sheet for ideas about how to reuse and recycle organic waste.

Current waste trends

In recent times, the public has become more aware of recycling, recycling services have improved and recycling technologies have been further developed, resulting in larger amounts of material being recycled. However, households and schools are still continuing to produce more rubbish as the population and consumption increases.

Have a look at the '3Rs' fact sheet to find out how your school can reduce, reuse and recycle.

Sources

Hyder Consulting, 2008, *Waste and Recycling in Australia: Final Report*, Commonwealth of Australia.

State of the Environment Report WA, 2007:

www.soe.wa.gov.au/report/human-settlements/waste-generation-and-disposal.html

Websites

Australian Waste Database: <http://awd.csiro.au>

Towards Zero Waste: www.zerowastewa.com.au/data/

WSN Environmental solutions, 2005, Your easy guide to waste technologies, NSW, viewed 31 August 2009: [www.wsn.com.au/dir138/wsn.nsf/AttachmentsByTitle/easy_guide_to_waste_technologies/\\$FILE/Easy_Guide_Waste_Technologies2.pdf](http://www.wsn.com.au/dir138/wsn.nsf/AttachmentsByTitle/easy_guide_to_waste_technologies/$FILE/Easy_Guide_Waste_Technologies2.pdf)

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