

ZERO WASTE

live the vision

fact sheet

Waste

Waste. Commonly called rubbish or garbage. It's something we all produce as part of everyday living, but we don't normally think too much about it. We just put our bins out every week, and the council arranges for someone to take them away. We all have to start thinking about the waste we throw away because waste disposal has become a major environmental and economic concern.

The history of waste in Australia

Historically, Aboriginal people barely produced any rubbish. The only signs of waste from our original inhabitants are piles of shell, bone and stone debris called middens.

Early European settlers in Australia produced very little rubbish as items were difficult to get in the first place and were often reused. Food scraps were fed to dogs, pigs or chooks.

Homegrown and fresh produce with little or no packaging was more common than it is today and many items were repaired rather than thrown away.

Until the 1970s people burnt a lot of their waste in the backyard so landfill wasn't a big problem. This was stopped due to air pollution concerns.

Today, our way of living has changed; disposable goods and convenience foods from supermarkets that have lots of packaging are now very common. Disposal items such as tissues and nappies are now often used instead of reuseable items and fewer households have chooks or ducks to recycle food scraps. As modern manufacturing processes make goods easier to produce, people often buy a new product rather than fixing a broken one.

For these reasons, waste has become a big problem, we are not only producing more waste than we used to, but our population is also growing. Suitable landfill sites are becoming more difficult to find due to concerns about smell, litter, pollution, pests and reduced value of residents' homes as urban areas expand. Councils in the Perth region have now combined into larger groups to share landfill sites, as it is often difficult and expensive for councils to establish new ones.



Why is landfill a problem?

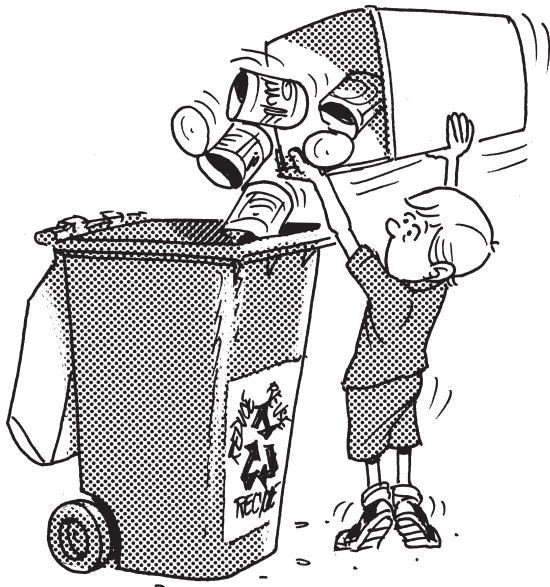
Landfill is where all our garbage goes. Landfill sites (or rubbish dumps) require space that might otherwise be bushland or public open space. Many people object to new landfill sites being established where they live because of concerns about smell, pollution, vermin and property values. This is known as the "not in my backyard" (NIMBY) phenomenon.

As we continue to fill up existing landfill sites, we create the need to clear more land for new sites. This 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 with contaminants from waste
- The creation of nuisance odours and dust
- The risk of property damage due to subsidence or the release of flammable or toxic gases
- The release of pollutants into the atmosphere in the event of fire

For these reasons it is important that we minimise the amount of garbage going to landfill by adopting the 3R principle: reduce, reuse, recycle.



Waste in Australia

According to the Commonwealth Department of Environment and Heritage, Australians generate almost 14 million tonnes of waste each year. That's about 800 kilograms per person!

In capital cities, only about a third of all waste going to landfill is household and other council garbage. The rest is made up of commercial, industrial and construction and demolition waste.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, in 1996-97, it cost \$1256 million to collect and dispose of Australia's waste.

Waste in Western Australia

In WA, the rate of garbage disposed per person, is higher than the national average: 1.4 tonnes per person each year. In 1997, 3 million tonnes of solid waste went to landfill in WA.

The table below shows where the garbage in Western Australia's landfill comes from.

COMPOSITION OF WASTE TO LANDFILL

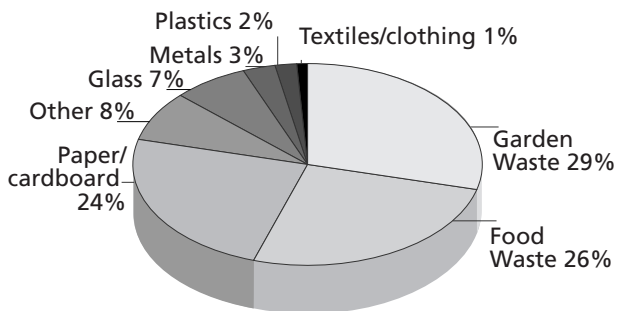
Waste Stream	Composition
Domestic kerbside collection	25-35%
Green garden waste	15-25%
Inert (chemically inactive) waste	25-30%
Commercial and industrial waste	20-25%
Hazardous waste	Less than 5%
Liquid waste	1-2%

Source: *Waste Reduction and Recycling Policy, 1997*

Western Australian domestic waste

The largest proportion of the waste thrown out by WA households is made up of green waste (garden and food waste). By reusing/recycling green waste alone, most WA families could cut their contribution to landfill by more than half!

What we throw out: composition of WA households' garbage



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, leading to larger amounts of material are being recycled. However, households are still continuing to produce more garbage as the population and consumption increases.

What can we do to reduce waste going to landfill?

Every household, school or business 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 buy products that have been made from recycled materials to improve the economic viability of recycling.

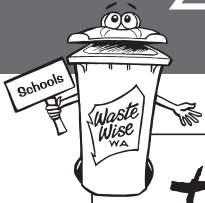


Resources:

- DEP. 1997. *Waste reduction and recycling policy.*
- DEP. 1998. *State of the Environment Report.*

Useful website:

www.planetark.com.au



The Waste Wise Schools Program

The following program elements are funded by the Waste Management and Recycling Fund from money collected as a Waste Levy when waste is delivered to landfill. The Waste Wise Schools Program is helping to work towards Zero Waste in WA.



Waste Wise Schools Program

This program empowers schools to minimise their waste outputs and incorporate waste issues into the curriculum. The program provides teacher workshops, the Waste Wise Schools Kit, a network of Support Schools, Accreditation and Awards programs and ongoing support.

Waste Wise Schools Mobile Display

The Waste Wise Schools interactive Mobile Display about waste and recycling is available for *Participating* Waste Wise Schools, community groups, expos and shows. A Waste Education Coordinator will staff the display to conduct presentations, school waste audits and set up composting and worm farming systems upon request.

Waste Wise Schools Grants

These grants provide opportunities for *Participating* Waste Wise Schools and their related communities to undertake waste minimisation projects in their school. Grants are available, with applications assessed monthly.

Waste Wise Schools Website: www.wastewise.wa.gov.au

This website is your on-line link to the Waste Wise Schools Program. You will also find information on how to 'Shop Smart', recycle organic waste at home and recycle a variety of different waste items through the RecycleIT directory. The complete series of fact sheets are also available to download.

For further information on issues relating to waste minimisation in WA, visit www.zerowastewa.com.au

Contact

For further information, contact the Waste Wise Schools program at the Department of Environment and Conservation.

Phone: (08) 6467 5133 or (08) 6467 5141.

Email: wastewise@dec.wa.gov.au

