

## Waste management

This brief submission looks at the key issues of **public education**, and the **changing of mindsets**, two issues which I believe to be pivotal to any successful, ongoing strategy of effective waste management, especially in the personal/domestic domain.

### Introduction

Waste management is not an issue which grabs public attention.

Waste is very a much a NIMBY topic (just see the tonnage of waste collected each annual clean up Australia Day - a sorry sight indeed and reflecting sadly on the broader problem).

Rubbish bins, both private and commercial, are NOT used effectively, despite local Council attempts to encourage users to differentiate their waste streams into what will become landfill, and what can be recycled.

Unfortunately, it seems, the majority of people do not know how to separate out waste, at source, before placing it in bins provided, and in many instance perhaps, do not care. So that by the time they walk to the bins, plastic bags full of recyclables in hand, they think they have done what is required.

At the moment, advice as to how to separate waste is only on the bins themselves. In some instances, WHAT can be recycled, rather than treated as straight 'rubbish' is unclear (plastics/lids etc)

Apartment blocks are the greatest offenders in this regard. I have a small unit in Melbourne, in an inner-suburb, and despair, whenever opening a communal bin, to find cardboard cartons not flattened, plastic bags full of plastic (recyclable) or glass bottles, general bags of rubbish in the wrong bin. A family-member, faced with the same problem in another block of units, wrote a note to each fellow tenant about how to separate waste, a strategy which proved a MOST effective mechanism - at least for a reasonable period of time!

This seems to show that **the issue is not just one of lack of interest, but rather lack of understanding** and that education may provide a key solution, in part if not in whole.

### Recommendations

1. What is needed is a UNIFORM, NATIONAL approach. Many local Councils are to be commended for their attempts to educate their rate-payers but until individuals are made constantly aware of the issue, the solution will remain piece-meal. Uniformity of eg colour-coding of bins to differentiate types of waste is one possibility, although some Councils are happy that all recyclables go into the one container at point of initial ie domestic disposal.

2. Perhaps thought could be given, not to the current:
  - Reduce
  - Reuse
  - Recycle

mantra, which clearly misses out on a pivotal first step, that is identifying correctly what is the waste-type with which they are dealing.

A more effective approach might be to suggest that people:

- **Decide** (into what category an item falls)
- **Divide** (into suitable piles or containers)
- **Dispose** (into appropriate receptacle!)

3. Clearly, what is needed is an **education campaign which targets individuals in the home**, be it a house, or flat or unit. For example:

3.1 An initiative, combining both Federal and local Council area input, might be to produce a (re usable!) **billfold style information pamphlet** targeting EACH household/unit/flat.

3.2 It could be accompanied by a simple **fridge magnet**, outlining perhaps in cartoon or image form the different waste-types.

3.3 A **peak-time TV advertising campaign** - shades of political campaigns - with 'real' people showing how the sorting should be done could run in conjunction with the development of the other materials (all disposable of course!), hopefully to prick people's consciences about what is after all a SOCIAL issue as well as a health and environment one.

4. Use could be made of the highly-commendable Australian Sustainable Schools Initiative by **targeting primary-school age children** about waste management issues. An often effective tool in public education campaigns is to encourage essays/art competitions, as research shows that parents CAN be influenced in their behaviours by lessons taught to their offspring!

5. Little attention is paid to the **importance of compost**, and HOW to compost. Whilst some local Councils provide a Green Collection, few if any encourage composting. Perhaps, THEY (the Councils) could be part of a national **Make Compost** programme with a Peter Cundall as its spokesperson!

6. **Incentive programmes** such as CDL, now being considered for expansion into States other South Australia are but one of many possible initiatives which could be considered.

7. A **system of fines** for incorrect sorting might sound draconian, but may in itself become an incentive to give more thought to personal waste-management

The 'disposable item' mentality so typical of our consumer society, without thought to the longer term impact on our environment, needs to be changed and NOW!