



ZERO WASTE

As today's throwaway society continues to consume escalating amounts of products, we also generate more and more waste, magnifying our impact on the planet and needlessly using large stores of precious natural resources such as oil, gas, wood and minerals. Most of this waste is buried in landfill, causing serious environmental problems including water pollution from water and waste mixing together to create a toxic cocktail of chemicals that may reach the water table, and air pollution through the emission of greenhouse gases.

If we continue to degrade and over-use our planet's resources, the earth's future generations will be faced with serious environmental and health consequences. In the past, resources were treated as abundant but now we realise their limitations. For example, the cutting of timber is not limited by the number of sawmills as it once was, but by the remaining forests.

Zero Waste is a design principle that aims to change the way resources and materials currently flow through society to help create sustainability: its ultimate goal is to minimise and eventually eliminate waste. The best ways to do this are isolated as:

- Reduce consumption
- Ensure the manufacture of products allow them to be reused, repaired, recycled or composted with ease
- Maximise recycling
- Minimise all other waste

In order for Zero Waste to be successful, subsidies for waste disposal and raw material extraction to create products should be eliminated whilst holding manufacturers responsible for their products and packaging from production to end-use or hopefully possible uses such as recycling (therefore putting the onus on businesses to provide sustainable products). The goal of Zero Waste is to promote clean and sustainable product manufacture and to prevent pollution.

Preventing waste by reducing the amount and types of materials that are discarded is the most important and proactive action that any individual or business can take as it helps to change people's mindsets regarding waste and is the most cost effective and environmentally beneficial method of reducing materials to landfill and moving toward a zero waste society.

WHAT CAN I DO?

The best way to work toward zero waste in our communities is to practice avoid-reduce-dispose (avoid all waste possible, reduce all other items through reusing, recycling and supporting sustainable initiatives and only disposing as a very last resort). Examples to get you started are:

Avoid packaging by bulk buying and taking your own bags shopping. Choose items with recyclable and minimal packaging.

Place a 'NO JUNK MAIL' sticker on your letter box and register with the Australian Direct Marketing Association's 'Do Not Contact' list that allows individuals and businesses to be removed from marketing lists. Go to <http://www.adma.com.au/asp/index.asp>, click on 'Consumer Help', then 'Do Not Contact Registration' to find out more.

Write to manufacturers who use non-recyclable packaging, who over-package their products or use environmentally harmful materials and encourage them to stop.

Reuse scrap paper and envelopes.

Use reusable containers instead of plastic wrap and foil.

Buy sturdy, longer lasting products that can be repaired, rather than cheap disposable ones.

Reuse bread bags and other packaging to buy fresh products.

Separate your wastes and recycle paper, plastic, cans and glass as well as organic wastes to compost.

Compost green waste and food waste through composting or worm farming

Purchase products that are recyclable or made from recycled materials these can then be recycled by you to be reprocessed once again, thus closing that material's recycling loop.

Borrow, rent or share items with friends and neighbours.

MORE INFORMATION

■ <http://www.crra.com/> - the California Resource Recovery Association provides a Zero Waste Toolkit aimed at communities who may be interested in implementing waste reduction and recycling plans.

■ <http://www.nowaste.act.gov.au/> - ACT's NO Waste site outlines some great ideas to avoid wasting resources

■ <http://www.zerowaste.co.nz/> - New Zealand's Zero Waste Trust

■ <http://www.grn.org/> - Grassroots Recycling Network goes a step further than recycling to address zero waste and suggests what people can do in their community, providing many resources.