

Inquiry into Recycling and Waste Management

Reducing the amount of waste we create, reusing as much as we can and recycling what we cannot use is critically important.

1. Incinerating our recycling is a huge waste of potential resources. It also adds too much to our greenhouse gas emissions. We would be smarter to recover valuable materials from waste and to find creative ways to reuse other waste materials instead of just burning them. Incinerating waste is taking a lazy way out and will cause more problems, including increased greenhouse gas emissions and toxic air pollution, than it will solve.
2. We need to reduce the amount of waste we create. Some single-use items that are not compostable should be banned. I believe that this action is being taken in other parts of the world. Items that immediately come to mind are plastic straws, plastic stir-sticks and excess plastic packaging. I recently saw plastic rulers packaged in individual plastic sleeves. The plastic sleeve is useless and when the ruler is purchased the sleeve is immediately discarded. There is no reason for this wasteful excess packaging. Surely we can change the way we package so many non-edible items that do not need to be kept germ-free. Edible items should also not be over-packaged. Supermarkets sell a single piece of fruit or vegetable on a Styrofoam tray wrapped in plastic. Water is sold in plastic bottles that are often used once and discarded. All of that packaging is unnecessary waste.
3. The government could support businesses to help them re-establish reusable packaging. Milk used to come in re-fillable glass bottles. We need to return to packaging that can be used many times rather than continue to produce single use containers. Supermarkets need to allow people to purchase food in reusable containers. In the supermarket deli, for example, the employee needs to be able to zero their scale so deli items could be placed in a container a customer brought from home. Deli items could also be dispensed using tongs rather than wasting a plastic bag on each item. I would purchase deli and meat / fish items in this manner with the understanding that whatever went in to my container would stay there since it could not be returned to the main supply.
4. Repair workshops need to be established so people can get items fixed instead of discarding them. Training could be provided to help people learn repair skills to set up government supported repair workshops. This would provide jobs as well as saving items from landfill. Manufacturers need to make items that are not designed to be single-use and are designed to last. It is ridiculous that it can be cheaper to replace a printer than to re-fill the ink.
5. Make sure that people are able to purchase items that are made from recycled material. There are many items that don't need to be made from new plastic. I wanted to buy a laundry basket that was made from post-consumer recycled plastic and couldn't find one anywhere. Items that are not used for food should all be made from recycled plastic. Laundry baskets, rubbish bins, plant pots and storage tubs, for example, do not need to be made from new plastic. Perhaps the government could

support the development of industries that produce items that are made from recycled materials.

6. We absolutely need a container deposit scheme. I know that container deposit schemes are used successfully in many parts of the world. It would not be difficult to examine some of them to find out the best way to implement the scheme. Learn from what is best practice elsewhere. In British Columbia, Canada, there is a deposit on the packaging for many different items. The packaging, usually a plastic bottle, can be returned to the supermarkets for collection of the deposit money. Many organisations make use of this deposit to fund-raise. Scouts, sporting teams and school groups have 'bottle drives' to collect aluminium cans and bottles, both glass and plastic, that can be returned to a depot for a worthwhile deposit. As well as increasing the number of bottles and cans that are returned for recycling it reduces roadside litter, litter that is often eventually washed in to the oceans. The deposit on cans and bottles is set at a high enough rate to make it worth returning them. This is similar to requiring shoppers to put a one-dollar or two-dollar coin in a slot in a supermarket trolley to encourage shoppers to return the trolley. There are not many trollies with coins in them lying around in the supermarket carparks.

7. Food waste needs to be composted. Schools and businesses, including supermarkets, should be assisted to set up food composting systems. Garden soil that is generated could be used on-site, sold or provided for free by local councils or used for local community gardens. Supermarkets should not be permitted to put food in to landfill.

8. Education is always key. People need to learn what happens to the recyclable items they put out in their bins. People need to be encouraged to look for opportunities to reduce the amount of waste they create by buying fewer single-use items or items with single-use packaging. Businesses, hospitals, supermarkets, restaurants and other organisations as well as individuals should be supported to implement composting and recycling infrastructure. People need to be made aware of the volume of waste we are all creating so we can be encouraged to create less. We need to help people to reduce, repair, reuse and recycle and to purchase items made from recyclable materials. People need to know what to recycle and how to recycle effectively so the recyclable materials aren't contaminated. People need to be taught to seek out recycled items instead of purchasing items made from new materials.

There are many ways of reducing our waste and we urgently need to put a huge effort in to implementing as many of them as we can. Burning the waste or having it dumped in to landfill should never be considered as viable options. These are not sustainable waste management solutions.