

**Recycling in SA – How does the National Domestic Waste Collection Standards affect consumers? – Suzan Oelofse** Branch Chairperson of the Institute of Waste Management of Southern Africa, Central Branch and Principal Researcher in Pollution and Waste at the CSIR.

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The backlog in waste service delivery in South Africa is a well known fact, and there is increased pressure on municipalities to provide waste collection services to all and introduce separation of waste at source. To redress past imbalances in waste collection service provision, it is imperative that acceptable, affordable and sustainable waste services be provided to all South Africans. However, poor quality waste collection services can result in a number of environmental and health problems.

Critical to the provisioning of services is an acknowledgement of the differentiated capacities of municipalities in providing the services. However, there needs to be some level of uniformity in the range of services that are provided, in order that citizens of this country do not experience different standards of service. Therefore, there is a need for municipalities to adopt similar services standards. In this regard the Department of Environmental Affairs with the assistance of the CSIR developed *National Domestic Waste Collection Standards* that contain a range of service standards appropriate to different contexts. The standards, which came into effect on 1 February 2011, also provide for the implementation of the waste management hierarchy that require waste avoidance, reduction, re-use, recycling and recovery and waste treatment and disposal as last resort.

### **The Standards**

The standards are applicable to all domestic waste collection services throughout the country. It states that equitable waste collection services must be provided to all households within the jurisdiction of the municipality and that waste separation at source must be encouraged and supported.

According to the National Domestic Waste Collection Standards, domestic waste must be sorted at household level in all metropolitan and secondary cities. In this regard, the service provider or municipality must provide clear guidelines to households regarding the types of waste, the sorting of the waste, appropriate containers and the removal schedule for each type of waste. Community participation in recycling must also be encouraged.

The approach to waste separation at source may differ between municipalities. There are examples where a two bag system has been implemented. In a typical two bag system, all recyclables are mixed together into one bag whereas non-recyclable materials are put in the second bag. For those areas where the Ronnie Bag system is in place, only paper is collected in the Ronnie Bag, while the other waste is dealt with separately. There are also areas where a four bag system has been introduced. In this instance there is one bag for paper, a second for plastics, a third for glass and tins and the fourth the non-recyclables. The three bags containing the recyclables are collected on the day following the normal waste collection of the non-recyclable waste by the municipality.

### **Waste separation at source**

All people residing in metropolitan municipalities could therefore expect some form of waste separation at source to be introduced in their communities if not yet implemented. It is a good idea to introduce a second bin or bag into the kitchen and start sorting the waste into wet and dry. Packaging materials and paper will go into the dry bin/bag while the vegetable peels, tea bags and food scraps should go into the wet bin/bag. You will soon find that you generated more dry waste than wet waste.

### **What can be recycled?**

The majority of packaging materials can be recycled. These include plastic bags, bottles, glass containers, metal cans, paper and cardboard. Other non-packaging materials that are recyclable include: textiles, scrap metal, used oils, tyres, old household appliances, batteries, car bodies, electronic equipment (e.g. computers, cell phones, video games etc.) and construction and demolition waste. Biodegradable plant material such as peels, grass cuttings, and leaves can be composted, another way of recycling.

### **What cannot be recycled?**

Car windscreens and mirrors, medical waste such as syringes and very dirty packaging materials.

### **Where can I recycle?**

If there is a kerbside recycling scheme in your area, please support it. There are also a number of schools and charity organisations currently running recycling initiatives. It is likely that the school or church in your area will have some involvement in recycling projects. Many of the large retail shops nowadays also provide bins for recyclables such as energy saving light bulbs (CFLs), batteries and e-waste (everything that works with electricity or a battery will qualify as e-waste). Municipalities also facilitate recycling by creating drop-off facilities at for instance garden waste sites.

If you do not know where your nearest recycling drop-off centre is, please visit [www.mywaste.co.za](http://www.mywaste.co.za) type in your address and you'll be presented with a list of recycling drop-off centres in your geographical area complete with a map of where it is.

### **How does recycling make a difference and to whom?**

Recycling waste reduce our dependance on the earths resources. This is important as already in 2007, we were consuming about 1.5 times what the earth can sustain. Natural resources are being extracted and used to sustain a consumer driven society and eventually there will be nothing left but waste.

Using recyclables rather than raw materials to make new products could:

- save electricity i.e. by recycling one glass bottle enough electricity is saved to light a 100 Watt light bulb for four hours.
- result in less pollution i.e. recycling 1 ton of plastic bottles saves 1.5 tons of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.
- save natural resources i.e. recycling one tonne of paper can save seventeen trees; eleven one litre plastic bottles can be recycled to make one pair of men's trousers and five recycled PET bottles can be transformed into one T-shirt.
- save scarce landfill airspace i.e. recyclable packaging materials accounts for around 3% of all the waste sent to landfill.

- create extra income and jobs i.e. recovery and reuse of waste paper contributes to a saving of foreign exchange.
- reduce littering

### **Institute of Waste Management of Southern Africa**

The Institute of Waste Management of Southern Africa (IWMSA) is a professional; multidisciplinary, organization with voluntary membership that was established to promote the science and practice of waste management. The IWMSA is committed to protecting the environment and people through sustainable best practical environmental options by: contributing to improving waste management standards and legislation; supporting international, national and regional trends in best environmental practices; promoting the science and technology of waste management; practicing affordable cost effective waste management; educating and promoting sustainable best environmental options