

Re-thinking Rubbish: Best Practices for Dealing with School Waste

1. Introduction

It's time to re-think the way you deal with your waste. From 1 October 2006 under the National Environmental Standards for Air Quality schools will need a resource consent to continue using their incinerators to burn waste. In addition, regional councils require that you have a resource consent to bury waste on school grounds. **If a school continues using their incinerator or burying waste on school grounds without a resource consent they will be breaking the law and could be fined.**

Schools use large volumes of different materials during their working week. It can be a challenge to know what to do with materials that a school no longer needs. Here are some ways that schools currently deal with 'waste' or rubbish.

Good for the environment:

- **Reduce**-ing the amount of materials brought into the school
- **Re-use**-ing materials for projects
- **Recycling** (paper, cardboard, glass, plastics, tins and cans)
- **Composting** worm farming or using food scraps to feed chickens or pigs
- **Off-site disposal** taking rubbish and recyclables to the tip or having them picked up from the school and taken to a municipally-owned or contracted facility.

Not so good for the environment:

- **Burning** materials in the school incinerator
- **Burying** materials on the school grounds.

Most schools have access to more environmentally sound methods of disposing of waste than burning or burying. The most environmentally responsible way to deal with school 'waste' is to reduce, reuse and recycle and send what's left off-site to an approved facility. See the enclosed information sheet for facilities and services available for off-site disposal of recyclables and rubbish in your region.

2. Best Practices for Waste Management by Schools

By following the best practices listed below, not only will your school be 'doing the right thing' for the environment, it will also be consistent with what children are learning in the classroom as well as creating positive behaviour patterns for our future citizens. It's also the healthier thing to do – cleaner air and water is good for everyone.

Getting started – tips for changing from burning and burying to off-site disposal and recycling

If your school burns or buries most of its waste, it may be challenging to switch to off-site disposal and recycling. As well as needing to find a disposal facility or service, here are some other things to consider:

Creating a waste-smart community at your school

Waste minimisation and recycling programmes tend to be most successful when:

- there is a keen staff member driving the programme and ensuring that things are set up and everyone knows what to do
- students and staff are trained in the system and what it means.

The Ministry recommends your school assigns responsibility for waste management to one person who can provide the knowledge and impetus to make things happen. Most local authorities run programmes to assist schools with training in recycling and waste minimisation. See the regional brochures for programmes in your area.

Minimising waste volumes – how to reduce disposal costs

The more that waste volumes can be minimised, the less there is to recycle or send to the tip. There are a number of ways to reduce the volume of waste at a school.

- paper and cardboard can often be re-used for school projects. There may be other creative ways to re-use materials within the school and community
- many schools require their students to take lunch rubbish home. Parents could be encouraged to use non-disposable lunch containers
- some schools don't sell waste-generating items such as foodstuffs with large amounts of packaging
- food scraps can be composted or fed into a worm farm. There is a number of programmes to help your school set up composting or worm farms. See the enclosed sheet for programmes in your area.

How to set up for waste storage and recycling

If you are just setting up for waste storage and recycling, the following should be considered:

- Ensure your school has some place dry and vermin-proof to store waste and recyclables. If your school has to store materials on-site you may consider buying a garden shed or other weather-proof structure – make sure it has a properly constructed floor (eg, a concrete floor) which is inaccessible to small creatures. If you are using a commercial collector, waste businesses often hire weather-proof bins as part of their service.
- To avoid fire or vandalism, the waste storage facility should be locked. Skip bins are often lockable, as are sheds. Wire cages are susceptible to vandalism.
- Recycling systems can be set up using simple materials. Plastic or cardboard bins in each classroom mean children can learn to separate recyclable materials from rubbish. See the enclosed sheet to see if there is any programme in your district to provide bins in classrooms.
- Used wool sacks are cheap storage for recyclables. These can be set up on a frame to make them easy to fill and reach.

Tips for Recycling

Recycling is a good way to reduce the volume of your waste to save money. It's also good for the environment and teaches students good waste management practices.

Check your local council website for the types of materials that can be recycled in your area. Generally the following can be recycled:



Glass - You may be able to put out glass if you have kerbside recycling. Most tips and transfer stations have bins for recycling glass.
Remove any caps or corks and rinse before recycling.

Yes: All whole glass bottles and jars

No: Broken items, window glass or pottery cannot be recycled. These should be wrapped and thrown out with the general rubbish



Paper and Cardboard - You may be able to put out paper and cardboard if you have kerbside recycling. Most tips and transfer stations have bins for recycling paper and cardboard. Make sure paper is clean and dry. Flatten cardboard boxes and keep paper flat to reduce volumes.

Companies in large urban centres collect paper and cardboard at little or no cost. Commercial waste collection companies may also collect paper and cardboard at reduced cost.

Yes: Envelopes, cardboard boxes, computer paper, newspaper, egg cartons, magazines, cereal and shoe boxes; paper with crayon, paint or staples.

No: Milk or juice cartons, paper contaminated with food, and wax paper.



Food and Drink Cans - You may be able to put out aluminium and steel cans if you have kerbside recycling. Most tips and transfer stations have bins for recycling cans.

Yes: Beer and soft drink cans, food tins

Some charities will pay for aluminium cans and schools can collect these as fundraisers. Go to www.canzbac.co.nz to find out more about steel can recycling.



Plastic - You may be able to put out plastics if you have kerbside recycling. Most tips and transfer stations have bins for recycling plastic. It is important to make sure that plastics are clean and free of food.

Most areas recycle plastics type 1 and 2. The number is shown in a triangle on the base of the container (e.g. like the '2' shown).

Check your district or city council website for the materials that can be recycled in your area.

Yes: Milk bottles, fizzy drink bottles, clear juice bottles and water bottles.

No: Yoghurt containers, meat trays, glad wrap and laundry containers.



When you are recycling:

- ensure the materials are separated correctly and put in the correct bins
- make sure all materials are clean as dirty containers are not recyclable. Cleaning recyclables also prevents flies and vermin and avoids odours.
- try to think of creative ways to re-use materials that cannot be recycled eg, growing seedlings in yoghurt containers.

Recycling organic or garden waste

There are a number of ways you can get rid of your school's food scraps or garden waste without paying to take it to the tip:

- local farms may appreciate food scraps for pigs or chickens
- composting turns garden and kitchen waste into rich, organic material that's ideal for growing plants
- start up a worm farm. They are educational and use up some of those food scraps and all the fishermen at school will get free bait!

The following can be used for composting organic materials:

- compost heap - a pile of material, covered with carpet or polythene
- compost bin – you'll need to buy a plastic bin or make your own from timber or concrete blocks. For big gardens you may have several bins going at once
- a high tech rotating bin to be turned regularly.

What you can put in your compost:

- grass clippings (so long as they haven't been sprayed)
- weeds (but not invasive weeds such as oxalis, onion grass and convolvulus)
- kitchen scraps, including coffee grounds and tea bags (but not meat or dairy products unless your compost system is rodent and pest proof)
- sawdust (but not from treated wood)
- shredded paper
- straw.

Worm farms use worms to help the composting process. You can buy a worm bin or make your own using an old bathtub or stack of tyres. Waste Wise is a national organisation specialising in setting up vermiculture (worm farming) in schools. See page 5 for contact information.

What to do about confidential documents

If you are worried about what to do with confidential documents when you can't burn them:

- buy a medium to heavy duty shredder - around \$250. The shredded paper can then be recycled and/or used for other purposes, such as packing or animal bedding
- think about using a commercial document destruction service. Confidential papers are put in special bins and taken off-site to be shredded. Some companies then recycle the shredded paper.

4. National organisations and resources

There are numerous national organisations working to encourage best environmental practices. These organisations can provide information and guidance in how to deal with school waste and minimisation. Some provide education resource kits, information and assistance for setting up recycling, worm farms and composting systems, and how to conduct a waste audit.

- NZ Association for Environmental Education (NZAEE)

The primary objective of NZAEE is to foster the development of environmental education in New Zealand at both national and regional levels and advises on an array of environmental education issues.

Website: www.nzaee.org.nz

Email: nzaee@xtra.co.nz

- Enviroschools

Enviroschools is a national programme that provides a 'whole school' approach to environmental education. There is an Enviroschools facilitator in each region. The programme supports students to plan and create a sustainable school, which may include looking at what the school does with waste.

Website: www.enviroschools.org.nz

Email: info@enviroschools.org.nz

- Zero Waste

Zero Waste New Zealand Trust is a charitable trust supports the activities of community organisations, councils, businesses, schools and individuals involved in waste minimisation and recycling.

Website: www.zerowaste.co.nz

Email: Via the website

- Waste Wise

The Waste Wise Organic Recycling Programme is designed to create an awareness of waste and to help schools improve their knowledge of ways they can reduce their general waste, in particular the disposal of organic waste. The focus of Waste Wise is setting up vermicomposting systems (worm farms) within schools ("Wormin' Schools").

Website: www.wastewise.org.nz

Email: Via the website

- Reduce Your Rubbish

Reduce your rubbish is produced by the Ministry for the Environment and provides a link to websites on solid waste services in each district council, and regional council sites related to rubbish and recycling. There are handy tips on recycling, composting and other best practices.

Website: www.reducerubbish.govt.nz

- Regional programmes

In addition to nationwide programmes, there are regional programmes focused on solid waste management. See the applicable regional brochure for programmes in your region.

5. Where to go for more information

The Ministry is aware that making a switch from using an incinerator and/or burying waste can add to school costs and staff time. To help with the transition the Ministry has set up an 0800 number - 0800 747 3340 - (9am to 5pm weekdays) to answer questions about waste management and the ban on school incinerators.

Alternatively, schools can contact the waste officer at their district or city council (see attached brochure for local contact information).

The Ministry is also:

- providing information on facilities, services and best practices on the Ministry website. Go to: www.minedu.govt.nz/goto/resourcemanagement
- working with local authorities and environmental educators to identify cost-effective ways of waste disposal.