

2. Waste Management Principles

Wellington City Council has adopted four general principles which drive its waste management thinking and strategies. These are outlined below.

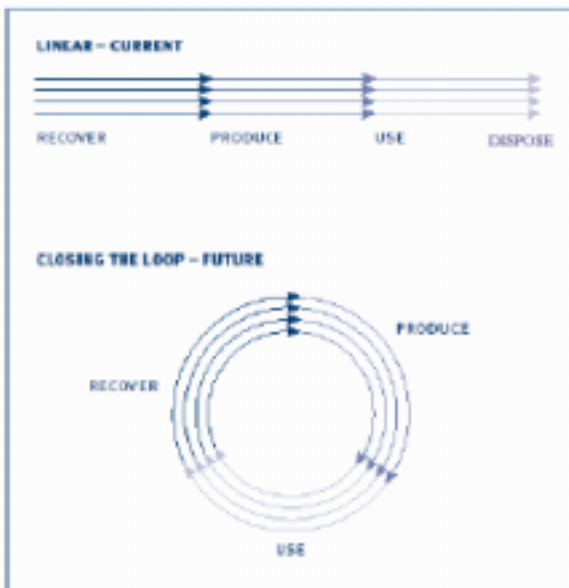
Adopting a Zero Solid Waste Approach

Council will work to the broad philosophical concept of zero residual solid waste disposal. It believes that the concept of zero solid waste disposal is achievable.

In adopting this position, Council recognises that this is a long-term goal which will be achieved by a series of interim targets for waste disposal reduction, and a continuous review of methods, capacity and impacts of decisions.

This principle presents the view that it is possible to achieve full reuse, recycling and recovery of all resources currently identified as waste. Rather than just focusing on the insertion of recycling and recovery as steps prior to disposal, it is possible to build an economy that eliminates waste entirely. Figure 1 below identifies this shift in thinking.

Figure 1: Current and Future Approaches to Waste Management



It is difficult for a community to envision the possibility that all wastes could be eliminated. By adopting this principle, the Council is taking up the challenge that it is possible to reuse all wastes, either as new products or for energy. This does not mean an uncritical pursuit of any and all recovery and reuse processes. If the Council is to either directly invest in, or facilitate the establishment of a process, it is important that the total impact of any new process is understood. Pursuit of a zero-waste target should be integrated with wider assessment of environmental impacts, and social and economic initiatives.

Council will pursue the zero-waste goal within the wider sustainable development framework. This may affect the speed at which zero-waste is achieved and the kind of approach taken. This reflects the Council's long term strategic focus on the establishment of an independent waste reduction economy in the region.

This waste management plan does not set a specific date for achieving zero waste at this stage, but it is a target to work towards and there is clearly a strong focus on driving volumes of waste down. Wellington City Council will address the issue of zero-waste targets once it considers that it has the infrastructure and framework in place that will allow it to achieve such a target in an efficient and effective way. It is the Council's view that its main task for the next five years, is to work to ensure the infrastructure and regional and local waste reduction economy is more robust and better structured to work towards that target. Once this is achieved, a clearer local and regional zero-waste target can be considered. This will ensure a zero waste target is achieved with maximum environmental, social and economic benefits. Meanwhile, the adoption of the principle reinforces and makes explicit the Council's long term intentions and goals.

What adoption of the principle does mean in the short-term, is a thorough reconsideration of the role and status of the city's landfill asset. Generally, most communities which have

adopted the zero-waste concept have taken the approach of not investing in new disposal facilities once the current facility is full. Wellington City has a landfill which has a projected life of 150 years at current waste disposal rates. The Council can make a decision to close the landfill before the full capacity is used. However, it considers that shifting the focus of landfill management, using it as a tool to change behaviour and then reviewing its role in the long term is the best strategic option at this stage. The implications of the general principle for landfill management are discussed later in the plan.

Responsibility for Waste

Council will work to the broad strategic principle that the solid waste produced or passed on by an individual or business for disposal is the direct responsibility of that individual or business.

In doing so, Council recognises that barriers can exist which make it difficult for individuals to reduce their waste. Council therefore also adopts the principle of intervention to assist private waste reduction until such time as that these barriers are removed.

The idea of individual responsibility is an extremely important principle, one which underpins many of the actions and initiative undertaken in this plan. It is central to funding decisions for Council services and to the decision to invest in education about waste reduction. The latter is based on the premise that the individual ought to take responsibility and that if given adequate information, will choose to take responsibility.

A recent survey of residents' attitudes to waste reduction reveals a high level of commitment to reducing the amount of waste going to landfill. This commitment although driven in part by a desire to avoid collection and disposal costs, appears to come from a generally held principle that people should act to reduce waste. Although less is known about the level of commitment to waste reduction amongst the business sector, it does appear that this sector takes considerable responsibility for its waste. The cost of collection and disposal is likely to be a significant factor for business decisions about waste reduction.

In adopting this principle, Council does recognise that there are a number of broad processes of waste production that are beyond individual control. For example, a household has little direct control over the way a product is packaged. An individual can try to influence production behaviour through their own purchasing but the impact is indirect. Many households on lower incomes will find it difficult to gain access to alternative products – either because of the price of the product or because of transport costs. There are also a range of barriers that exist at present, that limit the ability of people and businesses to reduce their waste. For example, there are technical barriers to reprocessing some plastics. This means that although a household is committed to recycling all plastics, it cannot because there are no end markets which encourage the set-up of collection systems.

Within this broad principle of individual responsibility, Council accepts that there is a current need to intervene to enable people to reduce waste. For residents, a key issue is ensuring that people have access to services that make it possible for them to act in a sustainable way on a day to day basis. While individuals have initial choices about acceptance of waste material such as packaging, they have limited access to recycling or recovery, unless these services are provided for the wider community. This is also a significant issue for smaller businesses where the scale of their activities perhaps precludes them from significant savings being achieved from large scale recycling.

Enabling communities to act in a sustainable way includes:

- ensuring that there are accessible recycling and recovery services available
- giving people information about the actions they can take to reduce waste
- acting as an advocate on behalf of the community over issues such as packaging of waste.

However, while the Council will intervene in the short term to enable people to reduce waste, it has a long term goal of withdrawal from direct provision of waste reduction services, where

it is clear that the private sector will intervene to provide services which support waste reduction. This already largely occurs for business sector waste although the issues for smaller retailers and businesses need to be considered. The private collection services for households are not yet structured around the principle of waste reduction. Private wheelie bins, for example, are of a size that encourages waste to landfill. Should the private sector approach change, then Council will review its own approach to waste collection and recycling services.

The Concept of a 'Waste Reduction Economy'

Council will work to the principle that the development of an independent sustainable local and regional 'waste reduction economy' is possible and desirable. Such an economy would be one where:

- **waste creation is minimised in industrial, commercial and construction processes**
- **waste reuse, recycling and materials recovery is a fundamental component of production processes**
- **there is a significant recycling and re-processing sector operating at different scales of activity**
- **the success of the regional economy is measured in part by the way it diverts and reuses its wastes locally**
- **waste reduction is embedded in the functioning of the economy**
- **local employment in waste reduction is maximised where appropriate.**

In working to this principle, Council also clearly acknowledges its statutory responsibility in relation to collection and disposal of waste to ensure that public health problems are avoided.

This expresses the Wellington City Council's long term view that waste reduction and resource recovery can be a fully embedded, almost automatic part of the way the economy works, and the way people act in their day to day lives. This is not fully encapsulated by the zero-waste goal which could be achieved by major and continuous investment of community wealth via various agencies. While this is possible, it is not desirable if waste reduction is to become an entrenched aspect of human action.

The implications of adopting this principle are:

- a very long term strategic goal of withdrawal from direct involvement in waste reduction activities. This would occur when the Council is confident independent sustainable waste **reduction** (not waste management) services and activities will be provided by the private sector. Withdrawal may occur at different stages for different activities
- constant monitoring of the impact of Council's presence in waste reduction on the emergence of private waste reduction services
- actively working to understand the nature of the local and regional waste economy, the changing viability and economics of waste technologies, the opportunities and impacts of regional development and transport costs
- active pursuit of partnerships with the private sector.

Adoption of this principle does not mean that Wellington City Council's long term strategic goal is definite withdrawal from the provision of direct waste services. Equally, the Health Act 1956 requires that a local authority oversees and ensures that there is adequate and safe collection and disposal of waste. Any question of long-term withdrawal from provision of services must not only consider the strategic benefits in terms of waste reduction but must also consider basic public health issues. This is especially important in relation to waste collection.

Partnerships

Council will work to the broad principle that:

- **partnerships with the community and the business sector are an important means to achieving its waste reduction strategies and targets;**
- **any partnership arrangement must be focused on achieving independent action which does not require community subsidy to survive.**

This is an important principle. Wellington City Council has pursued partnership and joint venture arrangements with the private sector and community groups around solid waste. It has done so at times because the risk of not taking action and waiting for stand alone private sector actions and markets to emerge was unacceptable. This may continue to be the case for some waste streams. However, as a general principle the intention is to avoid locking in subsidy of any enterprise or action which could otherwise exist as an independent activity.

This is as relevant to community actions as it is to the commercial operations. Many community actions have the potential to develop into viable businesses that occupy a niche that might not be taken up by larger commercial operators. Equally, community non-profit initiatives that are established because there is a gap in the services provided by the private sector, can mask future emergence of private actions. It is important that the Council assesses these issues as it works with the community and private sector.