

Officer summary of the discussion document: 'Waste Minimisation in New Zealand'

This is a summary of the Ministry for the Environment (MfE) discussion document *Waste Minimisation in New Zealand*. The full document is available at <http://www.mfe.govt.nz/publications/waste/waste-minimisation-discussion-document/index.html>.

The New Zealand Waste Strategy 2002 (NZWS) sets out the Governments' long-term vision for reducing waste, using resources efficiently, recovering resources from the waste stream, and managing residual waste effectively.

The discussion document proposes revised targets for the NZWS and outlines the Governments' preferred policy options to begin implementing the Waste Minimisation Act 2008 (Act).

The Act sets out to encourage reductions in waste generation and disposal in order to protect the environment from harm and to provide environmental, social, economic and cultural benefits. The Act provides for:

- a regulatory framework for establishing product stewardship schemes. Priority products can be regulated to ensure producers and others in the supply chain take responsibility throughout the product's life cycle
- a waste levy on waste disposed to landfill. Half of the levy revenue will be allocated to territorial authorities on a per-capita basis to implement their waste plans and the remaining half will be allocated from a contestable pool to waste minimisation projects
- regulatory powers for the management and minimisation of waste, including reporting on waste and diverted materials, and new powers and responsibilities for local authorities
- a Waste Advisory Board to advise the Minister on waste issues.

The Act strengthens the role of the NZWS in local government planning by requiring local authorities to have regard to the Strategy when preparing waste management and minimisation plans. It incorporates requirements under the Local Government Act 1974 and is complemented by provisions in the Resource Management Act 1991 and the Hazardous Substances and New Organisms Act 1996.

The Ministry for the Environment (MfE) is seeking feedback on proposals to implement the new Act and using the powers in the Act to minimise waste.

The proposals are as follows:

Proposal 1: Revise targets for the New Zealand Waste Strategy

The revised targets aim to address inefficient use of material and energy, environmental effects of waste disposal and insufficient information on waste generation, diversion and disposal.

Target 1: By 2015, reduce the quantity of waste disposed to landfill per person per year by 20 percent relative to an established 2010 baseline.

Target 2: By 2010, have a system in place monitoring the composition of waste disposed to landfill.

Target 3: By 2012, have a system in place monitoring the composition and amount of organic waste disposed to landfill or diverted.

Target 4: By 2012, have a system monitoring the generation and composition of construction and demolition waste disposed to landfill or diverted.

Target 5: By 2012, have a national system to track all hazardous waste.

Target 6: By 2011, have investigated the need for regulatory standards for storage, transport, recycling, recovery, treatment and disposal of hazardous wastes.

Target 7: By 2012, specific industries will develop at least three accredited product stewardship schemes that increase the recovery or recycling of the hazardous components of waste.

Target 8: By 2014, specific industries will develop at least two other accredited product stewardship schemes that result in the reduction in hazardous substance production at source.

Target 9: By 2015, regional councils will have established satisfactory systems to record information on contaminated sites and will have assessed which sites pose a high environmental risk.

Target 10: By 2020, regional councils will have investigated all contaminated sites identified by 2015 as high risk and will be implementing an action plan for their management and/or remediation.

Target 11: By 2015, all waste disposal facilities (including wastewater treatment plants, cleanfills and onsite wastewater systems) will be meeting existing regulatory standards and will be consented if this is a requirement.

Target 12: By 2010, assess the need for a national environmental standard on environmental management by solid waste disposal facilities.

Target 13: By 2012, have implemented a waste monitoring and reporting programme to generate consistent data on national waste streams including at cleanfills and other disposal sites.

Target 14: By 2012, the MfE and local authorities will develop a national reporting template for reporting on progress against their waste management and minimisation plans and other waste related activities.

Proposal 2: Identify priorities for product stewardship

Product stewardship is when producers, importers, retailers, consumers and other parties take responsibility for the environmental effects products may have - from production to recycling and disposal. Such schemes help ensure the costs of waste are reflected in production and manufacturing decisions.

Product stewardship schemes, voluntary or mandatory, have the potential to address problems with products that are difficult and costly for consumers and councils to dispose of. Considerations include the level of risk posed to people and the environment by poor handling and disposal practices, the potential for emissions reductions, and the existence of voluntary schemes.

The discussion document proposes three products for initial investigation:

- Agricultural chemicals – (Aim: voluntary scheme by mid 2009).
- Used oil (Aim: regulate as a priority product if the current voluntary schemes fails).
- Refrigerant gases (Aim: strengthen the existing scheme by using a levy on fluorine-based refrigerants to cover the costs of the collection and safe destruction of these chemicals. This may require declaration of refrigerant gases as a priority product).

The following products are identified for later consideration:

- Computers, computer accessories and televisions
- Packaging
- Mercury-containing lamps
- Lead acid batteries
- Mobile phones
- Paint
- Plasterboard
- Tyres

Proposal 3: Set criteria for funding waste minimisation projects

The MFE is seeking feedback on the proposed criteria for assessing which proposals should receive funding from the Waste Minimisation Fund.

Funding may be allocated to projects which:

- help promote or achieve waste minimisation
- help establish waste infrastructure; encourage innovation and the development of new product design, production, reuse and recycling
- provide opportunities for businesses operating in or entering the waste minimisation sector.

The proposed criteria are as follows:

1. Funding is for waste minimisation – reduction of waste, and the reuse, recycling and recovery of waste and diverted material.
2. Funding is for projects - not ongoing existing activities.
3. No better funding source is available.
4. Projects implement new initiatives or expand on existing activities.
5. Confidence that the applicant can deliver the project.
6. Confidence that the project can achieve its goals.
7. Level of funding from other sources - part funding is preferred.
8. Strategic value – for benefit or development of other waste projects.
9. Contribution to sustained net environmental benefit – e.g. cost effectiveness, impact on volume and harm from waste products.

Additional potential criteria identified in the discussion document:

- Scale - larger projects of national and environmental importance.
- Innovation - new and innovative approaches.
- Research and development – creating new markets for materials.
- Legacy waste - projects dealing with waste with no identified owner.
- Targeting to particular waste or waste streams.
- Repayment conditions - for projects with potential to provide ongoing revenue.

Proposal 4: Agree how to monitor waste and waste minimisation

MfE believes that the lack of comprehensive information about waste inhibits their ability to plan and develop policy and ultimately, to use resources more efficiently. To help build a clear picture of New Zealand's waste, and to help them monitor progress to minimise waste at local and national levels, MfE is proposing regulations to require landfill operators to report on the composition of the waste they deal with.

Proposal 5: Exempt cover material from the waste levy

The MfE believes that if the proposed \$10 per tonne waste levy is applied across the board, it could have unintended negative consequences. For example, it could become difficult for operators to source sufficient cover material (soil and rock) to prevent problems with vermin, wind and odours, and this could compromise the environmental management of landfills. Therefore, they are considering regulations to make cover material used for environmental management purposes exempt from the levy.