



Managing WASTE



What is waste?

As humans we create a lot of waste in the form of solids, liquids and gases. Textiles, paper, glass, plastics, metal, toxic substances and kitchen waste are put out on our doorstep - about 284kg per person in Ireland. We just throw it away and someone else has to come along and get rid of it for us! But it all has to go somewhere.

Waste creates pollution and litter and wastes land that could otherwise be put to use as a nature habitat or used for agriculture.

Where does it all go?

Waste is generally taken to local dumps, called landfill sites. Over 90% of domestic waste is disposed of in landfill dumps. This means burying untreated waste in holes in the ground. Sometimes the waste is simply piled up in a large mound and covered.

The problem with landfills...

Landfill sites have to be chosen carefully as they have an unsightly appearance and the mud, dust and traffic noise is a nuisance to people living nearby. Smells, litter, pests such as rats and flies can also be a problem if the waste is not covered properly.

The contents of the landfill also present problems. Biodegradable matter produces large quantities of carbon dioxide and methane. Depending on the area, these gases can seep underground or rise to the surface. Methane is potentially explosive and causes fires. It can seep into enclosed areas, spaces like cellars or trenches, depleting oxygen levels.

Leachates are also a potential hazard. These are highly toxic liquids produced by rotting rubbish which can drain into the soil and poison groundwater supplies.

Reducing landfill pollution...

If landfill sites are properly designed and managed these



hazards can be reduced. Locating landfill in a suitable, isolated area and ensuring the waste is properly covered may help reduce the problem.

Methane and other gases can either be vented, collected and used as fuel. Leaching of toxins can be minimised by lining the site before it is filled and covering it to limit rainwater penetration. Once a landfill site is full the land can be reclaimed, but it takes many years to settle, and care has to be taken if future problems with gases and soil contamination are to be avoided.

We must reduce our waste...

In Ireland, finding suitable sites for new landfills is becoming more and more difficult. We can't solve the waste disposal problems just by finding new places to dump rubbish. New ways must be found to reduce and manage waste. Out of sight is longer out of mind!

We should all be aware of how dependent we are on rubbish collections. If we had to be responsible for our own waste we wouldn't be so quick to throw everything away.



Carrying out a waste survey

Action Step 1

Get organised

To find out exactly what is being thrown out you need to survey the contents of your rubbish bins. Do this outside, on newspaper, wearing gloves and old clothes. Be very careful of broken glass and sharp edges.



Action Step 2

Separate your waste

Weigh the contents of the bin and then separate them under different headings: glass, paper, metal, plastic, food, organic material, textiles etc..

Record the amount for each class of rubbish, noting the largest section and the smallest section.

Action Step 3

Identify items for recycling

Next, separate out all the items which can be collected for recycling e.g. bottles, paper and cans. Don't forget organic material which can be used to make compost!

Identify items which can be reused for other purposes - plastic containers and bottles, wood, rags, cardboard and any others you can think of. Draw up a list of ways of reusing things from the bin.

Action Step 4

Examine left-overs

Now look at what you have left, this will most likely be plastic packaging and pollutants e.g. batteries.

Reduce, Reuse, Recycle!

With a little bit of thought and imagination you can find ingenious ways to reduce, reuse and recycle your waste...

- Try swapping disposable products for reusable products e.g. cloth towels for paper towels, handkerchiefs for paper tissues, lidded containers for cling film, replaceable blade razors for disposable razors, refillable pens for biro's, rechargeable batteries for ordinary disposable batteries.
- Avoid buying over-packaged goods - buy loose where possible and buy in bulk e.g. loose tea, coffee, washing powder
- Don't forget that items that you no longer have use for can be of use to others - seek out local charity and second hand shops and see what they are willing to take e.g. clothes, books, shoes, ornaments etc.
- Don't take plastic bags in shops unless really necessary - re-use bags or bring a canvas bag or back pack.
- There are lots of ways to reuse things - try some of the following or come up with new ideas of your own...
milk cartons and plastic bottles can be used in the garden to protect young plants from frost;
lolly pop sticks can be used to label plants;
yoghurt cartons can be used to plant seeds and cuttings;
re-use envelopes by covering the address with sticky labels;
shoe boxes and large containers are ideal for storage;
re-use paper to make memo and scribble pads - cut the paper in half and thread or staple together.
- Remember that much household waste can be composted so set up a compost heap now to use as fertiliser in your garden.