

## **Why Zero Waste for Wales**

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**Warren Snow**

There are three technologies for dealing with waste - landfills, incinerators and Zero Waste. The first two are technical solutions born out of the flawed belief system that assumes Nature is infinite.

The third, Zero Waste, is a social invention based on an understanding that to survive, human society must design a new economic system based on cyclical rather than linear material flows.

Wales must choose between two dirty, outdated technologies (landfills and incinerators) that externalise costs to future generations and the environment, and Zero Waste - a basket of new technologies competing directly with the old.

Wales, like most western societies, has a waste crisis and incremental change is not what is needed in a crisis. Incremental change simply reinforces the status quo and 'proves' that the alternatives don't work. What's needed in a crisis is a break-through strategy and that strategy is Zero Waste.

In New Zealand we have been running a campaign which aims to make us the first country in the world to set a target of Zero Waste. So far over 30% of local authorities have adopted official policies to eliminate waste by the year 2015.

By adopting Zero Waste targets, communities are saying 'enough'. No longer do they want businesses far from their influence designing products that have to be discarded at the end of their life cycle at great cost to the community. Increased capacity always leads to increased supply. There is no more powerful message that can be sent to manufacturers than communities ending the supply of cheap landfill space. They can no longer expect endless cheap disposal services for their products. This message ripples all the way up the supply chain and empowers those at each stage of the industrial system to play their part.

Large companies are also beginning to embrace Zero Waste principles. The business world knows full well that waste equals lost profit, and there is now a worldwide scramble to drive waste out of the system and gain competitive advantage.

Many of the communities in New Zealand that have adopted Zero Waste haven't yet done anything very different to those that haven't. But by making the commitment to Zero Waste they have set the vision and foundation for long-term change. Waste Managers and Engineers within these councils are beginning to redesign waste systems so that reduction, recovery and recycling are the core components instead of disposal to landfill (incineration isn't used as a disposal method in New Zealand). There is a huge amount of creative thinking happening within Council waste departments, including designing new waste contracts that incentivise waste reduction.

Non-profit organisations and small business people are very good at reading trends and attempting to ride the new waves - if they can get a toehold. The Zero Waste campaign has begun to create that toehold and has assisted the establishment of many new local recycling and waste reduction initiatives. Local councils now want to partner with local solution providers who can help them meet their Zero Waste targets and create local business and employment opportunities.

As single solution providers large waste companies are unable to provide all of the strategies to enable councils to reach Zero Waste, so the balance has tipped slightly in favour of local groups and small businesses. Having said that, there are still ample opportunities for the large waste companies to keep market share. The overall market will increase significantly because waste has to be handled in more complex and specific ways. The resulting jobs will be in the order of between 10 and 30 to every existing job in the current waste industry.

New and different types of advice are required to assist councils committed to Zero Waste. Experience counts, and people whose advice was previously unrecognised are beginning to create advisory businesses around the strategies and interventions that are required achieve the ultimate goal of Zero Waste.

The Zero Waste New Zealand campaign targets front-end issues to encourage industrial designers, engineers, businesses and manufacturers begin designing long-term solutions. Having said that, our efforts are mainly focused on municipalities as a clear and defined target group.

Zero Waste is a simply understood message - a call to action that can stimulate every sector of society to do something TODAY to bring about change. Zero Waste challenges the whole idea of endless consumption without actually having to say it. It enables even those who are locked into the system to challenge their own behaviour in a positive way without immediately threatening it. It does so by focusing on the end of the pipeline, which of course impacts all the way back to the beginning of the pipeline.

At each step of the supply chain Zero Waste principles can be integrated without threatening anyone. Design for the Environment (DFE), Design for Disassembly, Cleaner Production, Industrial Ecology, Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, localised production, decentralisation, resource efficiency, super industrial efficiency and many more such concepts are all embedded within the idea of a Zero Waste system. The fact that we can argue huge economic savings and jobs and business creation only adds to the ease with which Zero Waste can be taken up as a "NEW" idea. Yet each one of the above concepts has been around for a long time. Zero Waste simply packages them all into a simple framework for dealing with the issue that's at the heart of our abuse of the environment - waste!

We seem to have an increasingly positive climate for Zero Waste in New Zealand. Along with Councils and businesses, a major University, research institutes and schools are adopting Zero Waste principles. Unemployed groups are creating jobs from the new opportunities and some of the waste companies are searching for ways to become resource recovery businesses. Individuals in all sorts of surprising places are

offering to assist. Inventors and manufacturers are coming up with new ideas and significant private investment is beginning to flow into new recycling technologies. The New Zealand Ministry for the Environment has approved financial support to assist Councils develop their Zero Waste plans and a number of Mayors have personally taken the lead in their community's Zero Waste programme.

With the huge potential to create new industries and jobs, protect the environment and save resources (both natural and financial) there is in my mind no doubt that Zero Waste is the only solution to the waste crisis in Wales.

Warren Snow  
Trustee  
Zero Waste New Zealand Trust  
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