

Each year we produce approximately one billion tons of waste worldwide. The rate of waste production is closely related to the gross national product. The more developed a country is, the more waste it produces.



RECYCLING *in Namibia*

BY BERTCHEN KOHRS

Constructed from discarded bottles, this homestead in the north shows that litter can be put to good use. The bottles stockpiled near the house will be used for future additions. "Glass houses" make use of a free resource, reduce deforestation and lower construction costs.



Peter Tarr

A high percentage of garbage comes from products used in the home. More than 60 percent of this rubbish can be re-used and/or recycled.

Recycling, along with waste reduction, is the only viable solution to the garbage problem. Positive incentives for recycling include conservation of natural resources and protection of wilderness and wildlife habitat and reduction of industrial energy use and industrial pollution. Increased reliance on landfills, for instance, contributes to toxic contamination of soil and ground water. Considering the negative impacts of burying or burning waste, increased recycling and waste reduction become urgent necessities.

One of the keys to successful recycling is adequate publicity, awareness and citizen participation.

In a country with limited fuel resources, one also needs to look at alternative supplies. A family on the farm Ben Hur near Gobabis relies entirely on biogas for cooking, heating and lighting the house. Except for the initial installation, costs are low. Increased use of biogas would result in less exploitation of our wood resources.

Biogas is a renewable energy source widely used in Third World countries. It is derived through bacterial breakdown of organic material like plant matter or animal dung in the presence of water and at temperatures between 20 and 55°C. The products are methane gas, carbon dioxide, water and a high quality organic soil fertiliser. One cow produces sufficient dung per day to produce 1,7m³ of biogas, which is enough for a normal consuming family for one day.

Although the concept of recycling has been slow to catch on in Namibia, a number of companies are currently involved in recycling. Different materials are collected throughout the country and transported to South Africa where they are recycled. At present it is not feasible to set up recycling plants in Namibia due to the small amounts of recyclable materials in this country.

PLASTIC

A Windhoek based company called Plastic Packaging (tel. 061 - 235101) recycles scrap and plastic wastes which are purchased from Namibia Beverages, Namibia Breweries, other companies and private collectors.

The plastic is sorted according to cleanliness, colour and type. All labels and other contaminants are removed, the plastic is shredded, melted and pelleted and is then ready for re-use. The dirty plastic is processed in a



Manni Goldbeck

Namibia is generally regarded as a clean country. A scene such as this suggests otherwise. Litter is not only unsightly, but it can pollute water and pose serious health risks. Better facilities and improved services in rural areas could alleviate this problem.

second factory at Okahandja, which manufactures plastic piping and other items. The company pays 45 cents per kg for plastic waste.

GLASS

Glass collection in Namibia was initiated in 1990 by the Wildlife Society in Swakopmund. Four bottle banks were installed and have since been well supported by the public. Inspired by Swakopmund's success, concerned pupils from Concordia College and some Windhoek residents launched the Recycling Action Programme. In April 1991 ten bottle banks were placed all over the city. In addition, glass is collected throughout Namibia by an agent from Consol, a glass manufacturing company in South Africa. Depending on the distance to Windhoek, three to four cents are paid for 1 kg of glass, which provides a modest income to collectors. The active participation of people in the north of Namibia deserves special mention.

The collected glass is sorted by colour, crushed into little pieces known as cullet, and transported to South Africa for recycling. An average of 100 tons of glass is collected monthly throughout Namibia. This is estimated to be only 10 percent of glass used countrywide.

The contact for glass collection is Bosch Recycling Works (tel. 061 - 252841).

PAPER

Namib Paper and Plastic Recycling (tel. 061 - 262611) and Napcon (tel. 061 - 218454) are two companies in Windhoek collecting paper for recycling. All types of paper, newsprint, cardboard boxes, cartons and magazines are accepted. The paper is sorted into different grades, bailed and transported to South Africa and Swaziland, where it is made into paper pulp. This is then sent back to Windhoek to be made into tissue products.

Namib Paper and Plastic Recycling also collect plastic. The amount collected by this firm is 6 tons of plastic and 90 tons of paper per month. Greater public awareness could ensure more waste recovery and a cleaner environment.

CANS

In February 1994 the South African company Collect-a-Can (tel. 061-230006) started collecting beverage and food cans in Namibia. About 500 people in the north are involved in collecting cans which are transported to Windhoek by road. The public is encouraged to establish their own depots, thereby offering job opportunities for the unemployed. Collected beverage cans earn up to 17 cents per kg and food cans 10 cents per kg. In Windhoek cans can be delivered to two different depots: Kuranje Salvage Co. (tel. 061-228575) in the southern industrial area and Namib Scrap (tel. 061-215077) in the northern industrial area. From February to August 1994, 1 783 tons of cans – equal to

43 450 625 cans – were collected. This is only the start – Collect-a-Can estimates a recovery potential of between 80 and 100 million cans per year in Namibia.

METAL

Other types of metal such as batteries (they are still cause for concern because of their hazardous components), car bodies, copper and lead are collected on an ongoing basis and can be sold to scrap metal dealers throughout the country for various prices.

Arrangements have recently been made by private companies to recover recyclable garbage like plastic, paper, glass and metal from the Kupferberg landfill site in Windhoek. Already 35 workers are employed to separate the materials.

Used **mineral oils** from industries and cars are extremely hazardous to the environment if poured into the ground. The Windhoek municipality removes used oil free of charge from industrial sites, garages and private homes. A limited amount is used by the Rössing Uranium mine as an energy source. The rest is recycled in South Africa or utilised in the processing of ammunition.

Household items, which can be used in child art are collected by the Namibian Development Trust (tel. 061-238002/3). These includes tins, empty toilet rolls, bottles, plastic containers, egg boxes etc. NDT works in close collaboration with the Arts Association and has held a number of workshops for teachers on ideas for "junk art".

This article appeals to Namibians to spread the word about recycling and to participate in the existing recycling programmes in order to limit the exploitation of natural resources, to reduce the amount of waste, to keep our fragile environment clean and to cut down on energy usage and pollution. But let us not repeat the mistakes of other countries, where people are misled into believing that they are living in an environmentally responsible way while in fact they have become even greater consumers.

From an environmental point of view, recycling is not the final solution. The reduction of waste and polluting substances must become a priority, and can only be achieved through public awareness, pressure and a change in lifestyle.



BERTCHEN KOHRS

The author: Bertchen Kohrs is a founder member of the Namibian Branch of Earthlife Africa. Her interest in the environment began in 1972, when she read "The Club of Rome", a book which deals with the environmental consequences of irresponsible human behaviour. She believes strongly in the words of Chief Seattle: "The Earth does not belong to man, man belongs to Earth".



Litter kills! This unfortunate seal will die a slow death because of a nylon packing strap which has become lodged around its neck. The noose tightens as the animal grows.

Peter Tarr