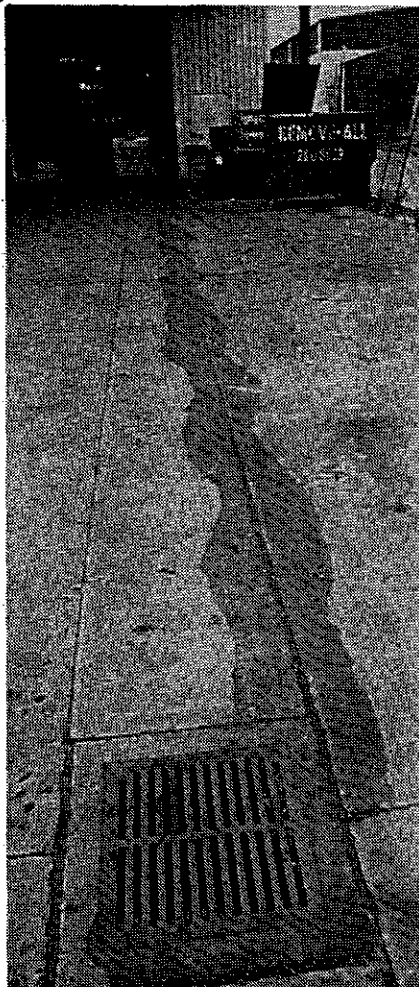


# THE SOUTH AUSTRALIAN ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH NEWS



**The Role of Local Government in Working with Industry and Residents on Environmental Management. See Story Inside .....**

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# THE ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN WORKING WITH INDUSTRY AND RESIDENTS ON ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT.

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## ABSTRACT

There are many ways local government can assist industry and residents in their Council to improve their environmental management. In many cases Councils do not have details of what industries they have in their areas let alone what chemicals they use or the work they conduct - a potential disastrous situation. The industries are very busy and often are not aware of all of the detailed rules and regulations they are meant to comply with, let alone the information on how to improve their practices with cleaner production. I believe local government has a role to play in providing industry and residents with information on the rules and regulations as well as ways they can help reduce the amount of pollution entering the environment.

## THE PROBLEM

The pollution being emitted from human practises is damaging the environment and our health. As development continues we need to ensure that it does so with minimal effect on the environment. This includes industry who need to conduct their business in the cleanest manner possible.

The regulation of industry involves many different bodies including the EPA, Councils, the Department of Labour and others. Currently very little information about the release or use of hazardous substances by industry is collected<sup>4</sup>. Monitoring tends to be limited to larger premises requiring licencing<sup>4,8</sup>. However it is the small and medium sized businesses who lack the time, resources or specialist staff to access information, and to keep up to date with often complex and conflicting regulations. They also tend not to be part of networks through which information is distributed such as trade associations and unions<sup>9</sup>. Therefore it is the small and medium-sized enterprises that are least likely to be aware of environmental issues and how they could reduce the impact that their businesses have on the environment<sup>10</sup>.

## WHY ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH OFFICERS SHOULD BE INVOLVED?

Environmental Health Officers receive many complaints regarding pollution and its effect on residents' health. In the case of air and noise pollution these complaints are forwarded to the EPA for investigation. With the large number of industrial premises throughout the state it is not surprising that the EPA are overloaded with work whether it be dealing with complaints or writing codes of practice.

Environmental Health Officers are in an ideal situation to work with the EPA to address these issues and work with

industry to prevent many of these complaints. EHO's know their local area and the community. By educating industry and residents on environmental management including cleaner production / waste minimisation they can reduce the number of industries and residents who are committing offences by discharging pollution, therefore reducing the number of complaints that they will need to follow up later.

## SOLUTION/REDUCTION IN POLLUTION BY CLEANER PRODUCTION / WASTE MINIMISATION

The traditional approach to waste management and pollution control treated environmental protection as an add-on something that comes after production processes or normal activities. This meant that the costs of environmental protection were added on to the costs of the primary activity<sup>3</sup>. This has generated the misconception that environmental management can not go hand in hand with economic development<sup>1</sup>.

The below table highlights the differences between the old and new approaches to waste management<sup>3</sup>.

CLEANER PRODUCTION/ WASTE MINIMISATION	POLLUTION CONTROL AND WASTE MANAGEMENT
continuous improvement	one-off solutions to individual problems
progress towards use of closed loop or continuous cycle processes	processes result in waste materials for disposal; a pipeline with resources in and wastes out
everyone in the community has a role to play; partnerships are essential	solutions are developed by experts; often in isolation
active anticipation and avoidance of pollution and waste	reactive responses to pollution and waste after they are created
elimination of environmental problems at their source	pollutants are controlled by waste treatment equipment and methods
involves new practices, attitudes and management techniques and stimulates technical advances	relies mainly on technical improvements to existing technologies

## BENEFITS OF CLEANER PRODUCTION/WASTE MINIMISATION

Effective waste minimisation can lead to considerable benefits for industry, the community, the Government and the



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environment<sup>1</sup>. These include: reduced waste disposal costs, pollution, and liability, as well as an increase in productivity, efficiency, occupational health and safety and profits for industry. Less pollution and greater safety for the public, less complaints to investigate and a pro-active approach for local government. There are many others, more detailed information on cleaner production / waste minimisation is available from the author.

**CURRENT WASTE MINIMISATION REQUIREMENTS**

US legislation requires formal waste minimisation planning and reporting by industry<sup>1</sup>. In South Australia we do not yet have such legislation. The Australian Commonwealth Government, in consultation with ANZECC, released its National Waste Minimisation and Recycling Strategy in 1992, which details its strategy to minimise waste, including industrial waste, with the focus on "minimising waste generation rather than just managing waste that has already been produced<sup>1</sup>.

The Commonwealth Environmental Protection Agency (CEPA) is charged with implementing the Strategy, and actions that need to be undertaken in conjunction with State and Territory governments are to be pursued through ANZECC and / or the Commonwealth Environmental Protection Agency<sup>1</sup>.

Victoria is regarded as the leader in Australia with respect to statutory waste minimisation requirements. The Victorian Environment Protection Authority, developed the Industrial Waste Management (Waste Minimisation ) Policy, a statutory policy proclaimed by the Victorian Government in late 1990, that creates legally enforceable waste minimisation requirements for industry within Victoria<sup>1</sup>.

The Policy authorises the Authority to promote, or in some cases require, the use of waste audits and the development of waste management plans, and requires the Authority to ensure any approved licence, licence amendment or works approval is consistent with the policy. It specifies the minimum acceptable level of waste minimisation technology for new or substantially modified technology to be that which is commonly available in industry, and addresses the provision of advisory and extension services to industry, education campaigns, the authorisation of financial assistance for research and development, and the provision of a waste exchange service<sup>1</sup>.

In Queensland under the new Environment Protection Act responsibility for licensing 24 categories of smaller industries, including motor vehicle repair, panel beaters and spray painters, cabinet makers and joiners, and auto dismantlers and scrap metal merchants, has been devolved to Local Government<sup>8</sup>. This enables local government to work with the industries on waste minimisation / cleaner production.

In South Australia the EPA has in place a cleaner production program which offers advice and information to businesses as well as conducting the cleaner industries demonstration scheme<sup>18</sup>. This scheme offers to a limited number of applicants: payment of up to \$15,000 of consultant's fees to study the operations of a business in order to identify practices and technology that can prevent pollution and waste and also reduce costs and / or 10 year interest-free loans for 50% of the cost of new technology, up to a maximum of

\$100,000 with no repayments required for two years. However discussions with the EPA revealed that the funding for this program has been reduced and therefore it will not continue in its current form<sup>7</sup>.

Under the South Australian Environment Protection Act the EPA can require a company to undertake an environmental audit if the company is in breach of the law. The EPA can only require the company to bring their site up to current standards. This would not achieve the improvements related to cleaner production and waste minimisation as the company would not be required to look at improvements beyond basic compliance<sup>7</sup>.

#### **ACTIONS BEING TAKEN BY LOCAL GOVERNMENT OVERSEAS**

Overseas many local governments deal with waste minimisation/cleaner production issues with industry. Examples of these include Orange Sanitation Districts, which has dedicated one engineer half-time to waste minimisation and source control issues.

The districts offer waste minimisation consultations, seminars, and library resources to their industrial wastewater discharge permittees<sup>19</sup>.

Ventura County's Environmental Health Department pioneered local government involvement in hazardous waste minimisation. Established in 1984, Ventura's program provides information and on-site technical assistance to area industries as part of local hazardous waste generator inspections<sup>19</sup>.

City of Raleigh wherever possible recommends alternative compounds and processes that eliminate potential toxic wastewater discharges at their source. In process recycling is also encouraged<sup>19</sup>.

#### **ACTIONS BEING TAKEN BY LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN AUSTRALIA**

Newcastle City Council and Lake Macquarie City Council have both instituted environmental audit programs for businesses and industries not covered by NSW Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) controls. These include manufacturing, construction, warehouses, transport, and service industries, such as panel beaters. The purpose of the audits is to help managers and staff of the industries develop management strategies to prevent and reduce the likelihood of environmental pollution. The focus is on precautionary approaches, often involving changes in work practices and measures for good housekeeping<sup>3</sup>.

A survey by Newcastle Council in December 1994 found that 82 percent of the industries surveyed perceived the audit program as a valuable community service offered by the Council. Further, 42 percent of the industries surveyed suggested that Council maintain regular inspections and provide ongoing educational programs on environmental issues<sup>3</sup>.

In South Australia the Cities of Noarlunga, Marion/Mitcham, and West Torrens, Thebarton have been undertaking work with industry on stormwater management, cleaner production, chemical management and related issues. EMRHA and Port Adelaide, Enfield have also received funding money to undertake this kind of work.



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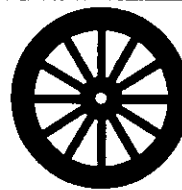


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Each Council has or will produce information kits and pamphlets to assist other Council's to do similar work with their industry and residents. Contact details and articles on the actions of the above Councils will be included in future editions of this magazine.

### ACTIONS THAT EHO'S CAN TAKE THAT DON'T HAVE FUNDING MONEY/AS PART OF JOB

There are many ways that local government Environmental Health Officers can assist industry in their areas to reduce the impact that they have on the environment. Simple provision of information, be it a kit or a regular newsletter all helps to increase the awareness of industry of the issues and actions they need to take. Site visits to industry are very effective in identifying areas that need improvement, the

Council can then work with the industry to undertake the change. If the resources are not available for site visits, the organisation of a seminar for local industry or a trade fair are other methods that can be used.

Once an information kit is produced, EHO's can take one with them when ever they respond to a pollution complaint and provide the information to the business of concern. All of these actions will help to reduce the levels of pollution being emitted into the environment.

While I have focussed on cleaner production / waste minimisation and stormwater management in this article there are many other areas that the Council can work with industry and residents on environmental management, be it stormwater monitoring, revegetation projects, clean-ups, and many others.

To discuss these issues or for more information contact Ms Jodi M Smith, at the West Torrens Council by phone on 8416 6218, fax: 8443 5026, in person or in writing at 165 Burbridge Road, Hilton, South Australia, 5033.

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This information, in the form of accurate labels and Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS), must be provided by manufacturers, importers and other suppliers of hazardous substances with every initial supply of a hazardous substance, or on request.

Material Safety Data Sheets set out information about substances and their ingredients so people like construction workers, factory workers, cleaners, hairdressers, gardeners and farmers can take appropriate precautions when using them.

For further information about hazardous substances, labels and Material Safety Sheets or other requirements of the Occupational Health, Safety and Welfare Regulations contact WorkCover's Health and Safety Resource Centre on (08) 8226 3120 or (008) 18 8000 toll free for country callers.



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