

Waste:

Waste is an issue that not only has climate change implications, but it also causes pollution and means that land is not really ever the same again for centuries to come. In New Zealand, waste makes up about 5 percent of our country's greenhouse gas emissions. Every year, we send more than 1.6 million tonnes of waste to landfills in Auckland alone - that's more than a tonne per person.

We've all heard of the 3 R's reduce, reuse, recycle, but there are several extended versions of this. Many that start with RETHINK - shifting our mindset about the way we use, consume and dispose of things.



Waste is hugely connected to the way that we consume and make decisions as consumers. There is a significant carbon footprint that comes with consumption, from the making of the product, to shipping the product, to its usage and finally, to its disposal. Let's look at what we are buying and consuming and ask - how could I refuse what I don't need, and reduce waste for things I do need? Do I really NEED another pair of shoes? Or a new couch set? If I do, does it have to come with copious amounts of packaging? Could I get it second hand?

Reusing and repurposing is about giving items a new lease of life. Shops such as Bin Inn are a great option for reusing containers - refilling - another R word. Or perhaps give an item away if you don't need it anymore - re-gifting to the op shop or on Neighbourly. Some items - clothes, furniture and electronics can be repaired - so many zero waste words starting with R. Auckland group Hub Zero organise repair cafes around the city where people can bring items to be repaired. You can find them on Facebook.

Rot - so composting. According to Toitū, waste makes up about 7 percent of a household's greenhouse gas emissions - that's about 500 kgCO² per year. If we make a simple change such as choosing to always compost, that would reduce this footprint by 20 percent.

Then lastly, after all the other options are exhausted we can think about recycling. In New Zealand, all glass is recycled locally, mostly back into jars and bottles as well as for construction material. Metal, paper and plastics numbers 1, 2 and 5 are sometimes recycled in New Zealand, but some are exported to Australia and Asia to be processed. Soft plastic recycling schemes in New Zealand process some of this locally, but I'm not

sure if it is all processed here. Then all the other hard plastics with other numbers are actually recycled overseas - if at all.

According to recycle.co.nz: Not all plastics are recycled. Some types (1 (PET) and 2 (HDPE)) are easier to recycle than others. Some get contaminated with food waste and cost more to be recycled (take-away food and drink containers). Some plastic types (3, 4, 5, 6 and 7) are often not worth recycling. This is because there is low value in the recovered plastics as they are harder to recycle and/or manufacturers struggle to make any profit from them.

Terracycle is a recycling scheme that works with companies to collect hard to recycle products. So far, in New Zealand, you can 'return' your used toothpaste tubes and toothbrushes to Colgate. You can also 'return' used pens and writing implements to Bic they then give these products a second life! Have a google Terracycle to find recycling stations for these products.

Just as a concluding thought - often we think that reducing our waste (and carbon footprint generally) will equal a sacrifice in convenience and that it's a LOT of effort. However, I really challenge that - of course with any action around reducing waste - it does take a bit of 'rethinking', but once you have a system established and a new routine or habit, it becomes quite effortless.

On a personal note - since having a baby, we've been using reusable cloth nappies most of the time - which for the previous generation was just the norm. They're also all second hand from friends and from Trademe. Once we had a system in place, it's been so easy. Then if we need to, occasionally, we will use disposables for when we're out and we choose the most environmentally friendly option. So this is not about being hard lined, but about shifting our thinking and doing the best we can.