

Role of effective waste management in preserving SA's heritage

Marking Heritage Month this September, Interwaste committed to commemorating Zero Emissions Day (ZeDay), as well as National Clean-up and Recycling Day.



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“To ensure we preserve our land for future generations to come, we need to actively address pollution and continue to find innovative waste management solutions” says Jason McNeil, CEO at Interwaste. “Reducing emissions and creating opportunities for reducing, reusing and recycling waste – thus creating what is known as the circular economy today – is crucial. What’s more, we need to continue finding sustainable alternatives for coal, in order to reduce our reliance on fossil fuels, the largest cause of CO2 emissions locally.”

South Africa is the 14th largest emitter of greenhouse gases in the world. However, the good news is that the South African government has committed themselves to a reduction in greenhouse gases of 34% by 2020, and 42% by 2025. Further to this, through the recently implemented Carbon Tax Bill, government is also able to put a price on carbon emissions, incentivising waste producers to optimise their operations and reduce their emissions further.

Innovation in waste management

“We are already seeing exciting innovations in this space, with solutions like refuse-derived fuel (RDF) as well as waste to energy projects – and with selected waste management companies leading this cause – we are bound to see a major shift in renewable energy options in the market,” adds McNeil. “Nevertheless, we also need to address the issue of recycling, a cornerstone to this and the overall circular economy. By recycling we are not only creating an opportunity to reduce waste, but also allowing for the reuse of existing waste products – which also ties back into a circular economy.”

It is estimated that last year R17bn of waste was disposed of to landfill, resources which could have been fed back into the economy by means of recycling, repurposing and reusing.

“Typically, recycling is seen as a consumer exercise and is driven by plastic, glass and paper. However, in the waste industry, we all have a significant role to play in firstly, recycling products that are banned from landfill – and secondly, helping producers find better ways of turning their corporate/industrial waste into useful products,” says McNeil.

“More so, with the promulgation of the latest legislation - industrial waste such as liquid wastes, which are now prohibited



Jason McNeil, CEO at Interwaste

from landfill, will now also need to be recycled/repurposed and or managed through innovative technologies. Therefore, we need to move away from the notion that recycling is solely a consumer responsibility, and realise that as legislation changes, such recycling responsibilities are critical and strategic focus areas for the country as a whole.”

Business incentives

From a business perspective, there is economic, environmental and corporate social responsibility (CSR) incentives at the core of recycling. Additionally, beyond a circular economy and zero waste to landfill ambitions, recycling has an innate ability to create jobs – something we are witnessing rather prominently in South Africa.

There is a real opportunity, for South Africa in general, to increase our recycling scope. Especially if we consider that we have the potential to recycle more than 6.9 million tons each year, increasing the current 34% recovery rates up to at least 65% - and with strong mandates as well as the new legislation in place, to further divert waste from landfill and instead source

alternative uses for such waste. “Opportunity and requirements to change behaviour have never been stronger.”

“This month, as we focus on zero emissions, cleaning up our country and recycling – we encourage both corporate South Africa and consumers to be part of a holistic approach to go greener, and manage the waste they produce and consume effectively. Together, only then can we preserve the incredible heritage this country has built, underpinned by an environment that we are proud to live and work in,” concludes McNeil.

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