

What Could Fiji Learn from Japan's

RECYCLING HYPE

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When you think of waste management, what springs to mind? Large rubbish trucks carting garbage for disposal? Perhaps recycling of kitchen refuse or maybe images of huge waste treatment plants and landfills brimming with all kinds of gross trash. Whatever your idea of waste management, chances are it's not the elaborate and effective model the Japanese have devised.

In Japan, waste management is really a way of life. It's not about just discarding rubbish into recycle bins but a lifestyle of reducing, reusing and recycling just about anything. The concept of 'zero-waste' lies at the heart of this notion of waste management.

All it takes is a stroll in Tokyo to realise there aren't many rubbish bins along the streets. You'd be forgiven for thinking that trash there simply doesn't exist, given the impeccably clean roadsides. It all seems very futuristic.

When you do sight a trash can, it's not just one but several, leaving you to figure out just which bin your litter goes into. Japan is kept immaculately clean and its people super keen on recycling. Everyone, from the youngest to the most elderly have bought into the system.

It doesn't just happen, it's a community effort that starts in the household. Every home is literally responsible for their household garbage – and it can become a complicated process. Every piece of litter has to be sorted and basically cleaned and householders must make sure they take out the correct rubbish on the day.

One of Japan's leading municipalities has refined the process to become a shining example of an effective zero waste model. Residents at the Kawasaki City are tasked with meticulously sorting their rubbish every day. Mondays are for glass bottles and cans, Wednesday and Saturdays for kitchen waste, Tuesdays for plastic and Fridays for paper waste.

Once sorted, residents are expected to put the rubbish in specific transparent bags and take them to rubbish collection points around their neighbourhood.

These garbage bag sites have no foul smell because the rubbish is taken out on the in the morning of collection and cleared by the municipality within a few hours.

Doing these rubbish tasks may seem inconvenient and complicated, but it's not impossible.

The attitude to support the system is instilled from a very young age. Children are taught the importance of proper waste disposal, a bottom up approach that is largely why Japan's impressive waste management system works.

Literally everything collected by the municipality is recycled in a system that involves the private sector.

At a collection facility the municipality again hand sorts the rubbish into plastics and paper, bails it up and sends it to a recycling factory. Mr Yasuyuki Ito, the municipality's recycling chief said that i

n the 1990s, Kawasaki City recognised there would be no space for any more landfill in the near future.

"That gave a strong sense of crisis to the citizens so at that time so the city promoted the awareness of the importance of recycling, especially amongst young ones in elementary school."

It wasn't just Kawasaki City that had to deal with this crisis. All of Japan actually had to deal with this dilemma first brought to light in the early 1960s. If mass production and consumption continued in an upward trend, Japan would literally have a tonne-load of problems on their hands. Policy makers had to find a feasible solution for its garbage or sink under its weight.

According to statistics by Waste Atlas, a single Japanese person produces an 'average of 356.2kg of waste per year.



As a country, all of Japan generates 45,360,000 tons of municipal waste per year', ranking it 8th in the world.

Because there wasn't space to bury it all, Japan came up with the solution of "waste to energy" disposal, a form of energy recovery where electricity or heat is generated from the primary treatment of waste.

Enter the private sector. Companies such as JFE Plastic Resource Corporation, a leading eco-friendly company based in Kawasaki city, are among the many that have joined the waste management movement to take recycling to a whole new level.

The Japanese government enticed local businesses with 1 billion yen (just over 18 million Fijian dollars) to invest in the Kawasaki municipality's recycling model.

Today, JFE annually processes 40,000 tonnes of waste plastic gathered from Kawasaki and neighbouring areas.

The model works for Japan because businesses are charged a fee for recycling by the Japan Containers and Packaging Recycling Association, which in turn is paid to recycling companies such as JFE to improve recycling and remanufacturing.

Mr Katsunoru Suzuki, the Director and General Manager Keihin Operations at JFE said what the company essentially does

is recycle combustible waste, turning paper waste into products such as toilet paper and recycled paper and plastics into pipes and tubes. What cannot be recycled is incinerated and the energy produced is converted into electricity for the grid.

What can Fiji learn from the Japanese model for starters is to seriously embrace the concept of reduce, reuse and recycle. How many of us are truly

recycling? Composting? Reducing our waste? Or simply refusing to use plastic bags?

Last year, the Fijian government placed a 6% Environmental Levy and recently further introduced a 10 cent levy for the use of plastic bags in a bid to reduce waste disposal.

While these initiatives are a definite start, community based recycling with everyone involved as they are in Japan would be more effective. Everyone would be responsible for sorting their trash and it would not have to be carted to a landfill. Our recycled rubbish and energy from the waste could be converted into electricity, achieving zero waste. Japan has resources and technology Fiji may not be able to afford as yet, but we can and must start somewhere. We could begin with recycling, or composting and get more into the habit of taking reusable bags for shopping. A start is to educate our children on the importance of proper rubbish disposal and encourage them to reuse whatever possible. If we start at home it becomes easier for policy makers to put in place effective systems similar to what has been done in Japan. Fiji is leading discussions at the global climate change meeting, COP23 in Bonn in Germany as this edition goes to print. We have the ability to steer and lead the agenda on climate change on the world stage. But we must begin with little steps at home, as the Fiji government has done with environmental and plastic bag levies.

Whether it's recycling, reusing or being accountable, when it comes to our reducing our own carbon footprint, let's start at home.

One small step at a time, Fiji can make a realistic difference on the world stage if we choose to try as a family, a community and a nation.