



Waste Management on Small Islands

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Abstract

Although an island can be defined as 'any piece of land smaller than a continent and larger than a rock, that is completely surrounded by water', this review of island waste management, by Andy Street of SLR Consulting, focuses on those that are small, remote and experience a range of sustainable development challenges.

With extensive experience in providing support on waste related issues to a significant number of island communities across the globe, Andy is familiar with the challenges they face – from relatively small indigenous populations, tourism, scarcity of local resources, remoteness from national or international markets and being potentially susceptible to natural disasters (including the impacts of global climate change, such as rising sea levels). This presentation presents an overview of some of the key issues facing remote island communities in managing their waste, and what measures are normally considered to be the minimum requirements for protecting the environment and achieving an appropriate degree of sustainability.

Key Issues

Some of the key, generic issues that are common to remote island communities include:

- The challenge of meeting increasingly stringent legislative requirements for the development and operation of on-island waste treatment and disposal facilities due to the relative small scale of such facilities.
- The relatively small permanent population and potential impact of transient tourist related visiting population can place considerable pressure on local Governments in terms of funding waste management services.
- Limited local markets for recycling and reprocessing and use of compost products. The size of the local economy and industrial/agricultural base often cannot sustain consistently high levels of material reuse.

- Isolation from established markets on the mainland for recycled materials and compost influences the economics and carbon impact of transfer off-island.

- There can be seasonal increases in waste generation, and high levels of packaging associated with the necessary importation of food and other goods.

Conclusions

Developing and implementing a truly sustainable waste strategy for small islands can be challenging, and this becomes all the more difficult for those islands that are very remote. However, with appropriate levels of realism and pragmatism it is possible to adopt an approach that provides adequate protection to the local environment. Funding is often a major issue, and external support is an inevitable requirement if modern standards of environmental protection are to be met.

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