

The Weekly

Information Resource Bulletin

FOCUS: WASTE DISPOSAL

Many people in Malawi have little or no knowledge about disposing of waste in a sustainable and environment-friendly way.

Materials like plastics and bottles are burnt or are simply thrown on the ground. Plastic bags are handed out everywhere and wind up in fields, in bushes and in trees.

Disposing of waste has a huge environmental impact and can cause serious problems. Some waste will eventually rot, but not all, and in the process it may smell, pollute our water and land or even generate methane gas, which is not only explosive, but also contributes to the greenhouse effect.

Therefore, it is very important for everyone to manage waste disposal in a way that doesn't harm the environment.

The goals of the Weekly Bulletin are:

- To learn from other listeners how the properly dispose waste
- To learn from cultural leaders on the roles they are playing to make sure their communities follow proper procedures in waste disposal
- To give journalists tips and guidance on their reporting on waste disposal and the environment

The Problem: Lack of Proper Waste Disposal

Some methods of waste disposal release air pollutants and greenhouse gases into the atmosphere.

Waste that has been burned causes problems, because plastics tend to produce toxic substances, such as dioxins, when they are burned. Dioxins are found in pesticides, plastics, solvents, detergents and cosmetics.

Gases from waste that have been burned may cause air pollution and contribute to acid rain, while the ash from burned waste may contain heavy metals and other toxins.

Improper disposal of waste can include pouring them down the drain, onto the ground, into storm sewers, or in some cases putting them out with the trash.

The dangers of such disposal methods might not be immediately obvious, but improper disposal of these wastes can pollute the environment and pose a threat to human health and life.

Certain types of wastes have the potential to contaminate septic tanks or waste-water treatment systems if poured down drains or toilets – again presenting a hazard to those living in the community.

The environmental consequences of improper waste disposal have resulted in countless incidents of land, air and water resources sites being contaminated with toxic materials and other pollutants, threatening humans and ecosystems with serious health risks.

Activities for Journalists

Use your radio station to help your community understand that improper waste disposal is harmful to the environment.

Mention the following as some of the effects of poor waste disposal:

Surface water contamination:

Waste that ends up in bodies of water creates pollution – and affects all ecosystems that live in the water – including all aquatic life. It can also cause harm to animals that drink from such polluted water.

Soil contamination:

Hazardous chemicals that get into the soil (contaminants) can harm plants when they take the contamination through their root systems. If humans eat plants and animals that have been in contact with such polluted soils, there can be a negative impact on their health.

Pollution:

Bad waste management practices can result in land and air pollution and can cause respiratory problems and other adverse health effects as contaminants are absorbed from the lungs into other parts of the body.

Leachate

Liquid that forms as water trickles through contaminated areas is called leachate. It can create a very harmful mixture of chemicals that may result in hazardous substances entering surface water, groundwater or soil.

Municipal well-being:

Everyone wants to live and visit places that are clean, fresh and healthy. A community with poor sanitation that is smelly and has litter and other waste strewn about does not potential investors and tourists. Such cities tend to have poor living standards.

Have a vox pop with a few people from your community and ask them how they dispose of their waste.

Have another vox pop and ask people in your community what they think are the effects of improper waste disposal to the environment.

Have an interview with a chief in your community and ask him/her what initiatives are in place to handle waste management. If there are no initiatives, what are their plans to stop improper waste disposal in the area?

Have another interview with the district environmental officer and ask him/her if there are any proper waste systems in the district, and if there are any, how are they managing them. If there aren't any, find out what is being done to put such a system in place.

Also interview an environmental officer from your community and talk about the proper ways of disposing of waste.

Community Engagement

Ask your listeners to call or SMS their thoughts and concerns about waste disposal.

Useful Contacts

- PRB contact person; Sandra Mapemba: 0999219789
- Centre for Environmental Policy and Advocacy; Tel: +265 (0) 212 700 104
- <https://www.ontario.ca/environment-and-energy/hazardous-waste-management-business-and-industry>



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