



"... our future, is in the bag"

CASE STUDY

Riverina Eastern Regional Organisation of Councils

Project rationale

The REROC Waste Forum aims to develop and encourage the implementation of best practice initiatives in waste management. The current REROC regional waste management strategy *Waste Wise Works*, which was developed in 2002, takes a two-pronged approach to waste management - projects to improve community awareness and behaviour on waste issues while also continuing to identify and implement solutions in resource and infrastructure management. The '*...our future, is in the bag*' project was developed to meet this aim.

The project also relates specifically to Key Result Area Six (Littering and Illegal

Dumping) of the REROC Waste Management Strategy 2003-05. Objective 6.3 of the Strategy aims to reduce the level of plastic bag use in the REROC region. The '*...our future, is in the bag*' project achieved strategy 6.32, which was to conduct education campaigns to encourage the public to use less plastic bags.

The project was also the result of the REROC Youth Council putting plastic bag use on its agenda by indicating they were interested in conducting a project throughout the REROC Region. The '*...our future, is in the bag*' project was developed based on the Tumut Youth Council project conducted in 2002.

Project funding

| Items | Cost (exGST) | Funding body |
|--|-----------------|--------------------------|
| Paid television advertising | \$4,400 | Resource NSW |
| Sponsored advertising | \$4,000 | WIN Television |
| Banner | \$1,000 | Resource NSW |
| Bookmarks | \$520 | Resource NSW |
| Notebooks | \$3,985 | Resource NSW |
| 17 000 printed calico bags | \$13,940 | Resource NSW |
| 4 000 printed calico bags | \$3,280 | REROC Councils |
| Cost of transporting plastic bags to recycling depot | \$2,600 | REROC Councils |
| Promotion site in The Market | | |
| Place (Wagga) (2 days) | \$500 | Wagga Wagga City Council |
| TOTAL: | \$34,225 | |

Note 1: Resource NSW is now part of the Sustainable Programs Division of the Department of Environment and Conservation (NSW).

Note 2: All REROC councils and the REROC Waste Programme Coordinator were involved in free local media.

Project description

The project aimed to put the use of plastic bags on the REROC community agenda; encourage the community to use less plastic bags by providing the community with calico bags; and encourage the community to recycle plastic bags. A range of strategies were employed and are outlined in this case study.

The project was conducted in June and July 2003 across the 13 REROC Waste Forum member Councils. Due to its success the project was extended into August 2003.



Project stakeholders

- REROC Waste Forum members, who co-ordinated the project within each Council;
- Council reception staff, who exchanged plastic bags for calico bags;
- Staff at Council depots, who stored calico bags and often transported the plastic bags to the recyclers (some Councils transported plastic bags over 100km to the recyclers);
- Council Mayors and General Managers, who promoted the project in the media;
- Youth Councils in some Council areas;
- Local newspapers, radio stations and television stations, which ran stories about the project over a three-month period;
- The local recycler, who received the plastic bags, pressed all of the plastic bags into bales and sent them to a Sydney processing plant to be recycled;
- Members of the local community, especially those that participated in the calico bag exchange.

Project targets

The project targeted those people living in the REROC region, with a particular focus on those who are open to alternatives to plastic bags or had a stockpile of plastic bags in their home. The target group was purposely broad to ensure the project was relevant to as many people as possible.

Project methods

The project employed a number of strategies, which included:

- The REROC Calico Bag Giveaway, in which members of the community were able to exchange 20 plastic bags for one calico bag at their local council. Some councils involved schools and nursing homes in the exchange process. The project started with 9,000 calico bags, almost all of which were distributed in just two weeks in exchange for about 140,000 plastic bags. Another 8,000 calico bags were then ordered, and in a further four weeks Councils had distributed all 17,000 calico bags and collected about 340,000

plastic bags in return. Although the project officially ended in August 2003 another 4,000 calico bags were ordered on 1 September 2003, with Councils meeting this cost. All plastic bags collected were taken to a local recycler in Wagga Wagga. Junee Shire Council used some of the plastic bags to fill beanbags at a local youth centre. Calico bags were available only from Council offices or Council-managed sites to ensure that bags were given away only in exchange for plastic bags. A number of Councils set up sites at local shopping centres and outside schools.

- A locally produced television advertising campaign on Wagga Wagga and Albury television stations. Station sponsorship matched the REROC Waste Forum expenditure with one free advertisement for each paid advertisement.
- Media releases were issued at the regional level, and these were well supported. Each Council also conducted local media campaigns through local newspapers, school and community newsletters and Council newsletters.

Other promotional materials carrying the *'...our future, is in the bag'* message included:

- A5 notebooks to promote the project among businesses and councillors. These were distributed to REROC Waste Forum members, REROC Mayors and General Managers, sponsors, interested businesses and Council staff involved in the project;
- Smaller 25-page notebooks to promote the project among community members. These were distributed to the community at Council offices, shopping centres, and nursing homes, and through schools;
- Bookmarks to promote the project among community members;
- A pull up banner displayed throughout the region during the project and used as a backdrop in all media interviews.

How was the project evaluated?

The support of the local REROC community was evident from the fact that Councils collected almost 400,000 plastic bags, the equivalent of three plastic bags for every one of the 125,000 people living in the REROC region. Councils were able to distribute every calico bag allocated to their area, with some Councils purchasing more calico bags to meet demand community response.

Councils and the REROC Waste Programme Co-ordinator received telephone calls from community members congratulating them on the achievements of the project. Some anecdotal feedback has indicated that more needs to be done to ensure people use the calico bags while shopping. A number of calls have been received from businesses wanting to use the REROC calico bags in their business operation.

Project resources

- ‘...our future, is in the bag’ notebook for businesses and councillors;
- ‘...our future, is in the bag’ notebook for community members;
- ‘...our future, is in the bag’ bookmark;
- ‘...our future, is in the bag’ pull up banner;
- REROC plastic bag television advertisement;
- REROC media releases;
- REROC calico bags;
- Posters produced by Councils for Council offices.



Project outcomes

| Changes in... | Qualitative or quantitative data indicating change |
|---|--|
| Knowledge / awareness | Improved awareness of issues associated with plastic bags, especially from the ‘localised’ promotion of outcomes – about 400,000 plastic bags collected over three months. |
| Attitudes / motivation | Community response indicated that people were motivated to obtain/use calico bags. |
| Behaviour | Most Councils are still collecting plastic bags for recycling although they have distributed all calico bags. There was also a small increase in the number of plastic bags deposited at the local recycling depot. Forum members also reported seeing increased use of calico bags in the region. |
| Other changes (e.g., infrastructure / organisational) | Some Councils are considering plastic bag collection bins for community drop-off. (Council would collect and transport the plastic bags to the recyclers in Wagga Wagga) |

Environmental outcomes

- Almost 21,000 calico bags have been distributed which may potentially be used as an alternative to plastic bags, thereby reducing plastic bag demand and use. However, this project does not attempt to quantify this potential reduction.
- A diversion of about 400,000 plastic bags from landfill to recycling (via collection and transport to a local recycling business in Wagga Wagga).

How will the outcomes/learning be maintained/reinforced?

The REROC Waste Forum member Councils viewed this project as the first step in tackling the problem of plastic bags. The Forum is now implementing *'bagged! businesses promoting a better environment'* as the second stage of a longer term strategy to reduce the use of plastic bags in REROC areas. Another calico bag exchange project may be conducted at the end of 2003-04. The REROC calico bag exchange could become an annual event if continued funding is made available.



For more information

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