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IWMSA MEDIA ALERT - Organic Waste - Opening a can of worms

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With waste to landfill becoming an ever critical concern, particularly in certain regions, the Institute of Waste Management of Southern Africa (IWMSA) calls to attention the necessity for managing all our waste streams, especially that of organic waste.

Typically, in South Africa anything from 35% to 40% of all waste that is sent to landfill is organic; that is, of plant or animal origin, and able to be broken down by other living organisms. Stan Jewaskiewitz, President of the IWMSA says "Something that is not often stressed, is that despite the fact that waste may be 'organic', once it reaches a landfill and decomposes under anaerobic conditions (where oxygen is not present), it is responsible for producing quantities of methane gas as well as releasing potentially hazardous chemicals into the landfill's leachate, and thence into the groundwater.

"We may think that our biodegradable waste is fairly harmless, but this is a misconception and needs to be brought to the attention of the public. As matters currently stand, our landfills have limited lifespans and are becoming oversubscribed, while, for any number of reasons, gas to energy projects are not sufficiently utilised to solve the present problems," Jewaskiewitz adds.

Our first course of action should be to minimise the amount of organic waste that we generate to begin with. As a basic example, in our homes, we all have a tendency to stock up on more fruit and vegetables than are adequate for our needs. As a result, many of these food items end up spoiling and have to be thrown away. Of course, there is the increasing need to economise, but we need to bear in mind that sometimes bulk purchases don't necessarily represent a saving if we simply cannot use the produce before it begins to degrade. Secondly, we must make better use of composting methods wherever possible, correctly separating our waste at source. Organic matter is all too often consigned to the dustbin along with other refuse whilst if separated, both container and organic matter could be recycled. Finally, we must employ the most effective ways of processing what is left behind, for example vermiculture, (worm farms) or Bokashi's which are an efficient and effective means of producing rich composting material from organic matter, and needn't take up a large amount of space.

Jewaskiewitz concludes, "The alternative management of waste is beginning to garner more interest as an industry, thanks to professionals and entrepreneurial individuals who are truly concerned with the problem at hand, and who are coming up with more and more creative and practical management methods. The IWMSA supports and encourages research and education in this sector and we hope to continue to see innovative solutions being put into practice."

The IWMSA focuses on providing education and training for its members, as well as other

interested parties, whether private individuals or government entities.

The IWMSA is a non-profit organisation comprising a body of dedicated professionals in their respective fields, who give freely and voluntarily of their time and expertise in order to effectively educate, promote and further the science and practice of waste management. For more information, visit: www.iwmsa.co.za

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