



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **World Environment Day – 05 June 2014 South Africans urged to Reduce, Reuse and Recycle waste properly**

#### **Immediate release**

**27 May 2014**

*World Environment Day (WED), the United Nation's (UN) vehicle in promoting the importance of looking after the environment, annually takes place on 05 June. The Institute of Waste Management of Southern Africa (IWMSA) supports the views of the UN and its plight to reduce factors contributing to climate change. The growing environmental impact landfill sites have in South Africa needs to be addressed and every citizen can help reduce their environmental footprint.*

This year's theme for WED is Small Island Developing States and the growing impact climate change has on the world's islands. In a statement\* by the UN Secretary-General, Mr Ban Ki-moon, he mentions that all countries are urged to do their part in setting the planet on a sustainable path and to address climate change.

The most recent National Waste Information Baseline Report\*\* indicates that South Africa generated approximately 108 million tonnes of waste in 2011 where 98 million tonnes were disposed of at landfills. Only 10% of all waste generated was recycled during that year. According to Dr Suzan Oelofse, President of the IWMSA, landfill gas is a general term that describes the gas produced during the microbial degradation of organic waste in a landfill. Landfills are among the biggest producers of methane, a gas which is 21 times worse than carbon dioxide in terms of its so-called greenhouse effect\*\*\* and is a contributing factor to climate change.

According to the Greenhouse Gas Inventory for South Africa\*\*\*\*, conducted from 2000 - 2010 and published in 2014, the total greenhouse gas emissions from solid waste disposal on land increased with 72.3% over a ten year period from 2000 to 2010. "Although the use of biogas from landfills to produce electricity is a good alternative to methane emissions in the environment, it should not be used to advocate landfilling as the best waste treatment option, since the present day trend is towards waste minimisation rather than towards waste disposal," explains Oelofse.

“There are a number of ways citizens can proactively contribute to landfill waste minimisation. Firstly, people can start minimising organic waste generation. Food waste is one example of organic waste that can be minimised by recycling the packaging, giving away leftover food to the less fortunate and saving food before it spoils, for example making a hearty soup from leftovers. Secondly, citizens can compost organic waste, which is preferred over landfilling as it is an aerobic process that only releases CO<sub>2</sub> and not methane as is the case at landfills. Thirdly, alternative technologies for organic waste management can be adopted, which include anaerobic digestion where waste decomposes in a controlled environment (reactor). The gas can then be collected and used as an energy source or converted to electricity. Alternatively the gas can be flared off (burned) to convert methane to CO<sub>2</sub>, which is less harmful to the environment,” concludes Oelofse.

For more information about the IWMSA, visit [www.iwmsa.co.za](http://www.iwmsa.co.za). IWMSA is also on Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn.

\* United Nations: [http://www.unep.org/wed/messages/SG-WED-Message.asp#.U3Rm0\\_mSzS0](http://www.unep.org/wed/messages/SG-WED-Message.asp#.U3Rm0_mSzS0)

\*\* Department of Environmental Affairs (2012). National Waste Information Baseline Report. Department of Environmental Affairs. Pretoria, South Africa.

\*\*\* Strachan et al. 2006

\*\*\*\* Department of Environmental Affairs:  
<http://www.saaqis.org.za/filedownload.aspx?fileid=806>

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