



ENVIRONMENT

LET'S SAVE THE WORLD

Ready to
RRRRRoll?

Most of us have heard of the four Rs in the quest to eliminate waste on our planet: Rethink, Reduce, Reuse and Recycle. WesternCape on Wellness (WoW!) weighs in on how we can all contribute towards a cleaner Earth.

Article by WoW! Team

'Humanity is waging a war on nature. Nature always strikes back, and it is already doing so with growing force and fury. The impacts fall most heavily on the world's most vulnerable people. Human activities are at the root of our descent towards chaos. But that means human action can help solve it. Making peace with nature is the defining task of the 21st century. It must be the top, top priority for everyone, everywhere.'

– Extract from the UN Secretary General's 'State of the Planet' address, Dec 2020, Columbia University, NY, USA
As population levels and consumption patterns increase, so the impact on our natural resources increases. Conservation of the natural environment and economic development are slowly being recognised as being on the same side of the coin, rather than representing opposing faces. South Africa is ranked 128 out of 146 countries on the Environmental Sustainability Index.

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Human action can help solve this problem, and the best place to start making a difference is right in your own home.

It requires that we rethink how we as individuals, families, communities and countries behave and then do everything we can to help our environment by reducing, reusing and recycling whatever we can.

Learn to Rethink

Rethinking how we interact with our environment and our planet is vital. What are the consequences of what we eat, drink and buy, and the mode of travel – today and the next month, year and decade? What impact do our proposed actions have on ourselves, our communities, our country and our planet?

Here are a few ideas to kickstart your rethinking and help you on the road to becoming an environmental advocate:

Rethink shopping. Do you really need that new clothing item, gadget or heavily packaged take-away? Have you considered buying pre-loved items at thrift stores, using a classifieds service like Gumtree, or taking reusable bags along on your next grocery run? Are you buying in bulk (where possible) to minimise packaging and save money? What about eating more healthy plant-based foods and cutting down on consuming animal products? How about growing your own vegetables? You'll boost your health too!

Rethink waste. How much waste do you generate each week, and what type of waste is it? How much of that could you refuse, reduce, reuse or recycle?

Learn to Reduce

Reducing is simply creating less waste. It's the best method to keep the environment clean and stop the problem at its source.

Here are some easy tips to implement:

Pack your lunch in a durable lunchbox or reusable lunch bag. Paper and plastic bags create a huge amount of waste and plastic bags take hundreds of years to decompose.

Bring reusable bags to the grocery store. Many sell canvas or durable plastic shopping bags that can be used repeatedly.

Say no to bottled water. Try a reusable water bottle.

Be mindful of what you buy. Pay attention to food packaging in the supermarket. Can the container be cleaned out and reused? Look for items with less packaging when making your choice.

Create a compost heap from food scraps, garden trimmings, and other organic waste. Adding compost to soil increases its water retention, decreases erosion and keeps organic materials out of landfills.



“ Every item diverted from landfills make a small move towards a cleaner world

Raise the cutting height of your lawnmower during summer.

This keeps grass shaded and cooler, reducing weed growth, browning, and the need for watering.

Donate healthy plants that you want to replace to community gardens, parks and schools.

Use a wood-burning fireplace and save your ashes. Once cooled, they can be mixed into your compost heap and provide nutrients to your garden.

Turn off or unplug lights during the day. This saves energy and help your lights last longer.

Storms can cause power outages. Prevent waste by keeping rechargeable batteries for your torches. If you do use disposable batteries, reduce hazardous waste by buying ones with a low mercury content.

Learn to Reuse

Reusing is to take old or unwanted items that you might otherwise throw away, and find a new use for them.

There are many ways to reuse items to help reduce your waste footprint:

Repurpose an old item. When it's time to throw something out, consider other possible ways to upcycle it. Glass jars can be used to store your stationery. Old bath towels can be cut up and used as washcloths or Thera-bands. Plastic cooldrink bottles take on a new life as bird feeders. And the toothbrush you're replacing makes the perfect scrubbing brush for hard-to-reach areas.

Clean out your cupboard. Instead of throwing away unwanted clothes, give them away or donate them to charitable organisations. Use old jeans and socks to make kettlebells or dumbbells for your workouts.

Hold a garage sale. It's a great way to get rid of items you no longer need, to clean out your space, and make a little extra cash.



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Learn to Recycle

Recycling has become a global priority. Every item diverted from landfills make a small move towards a cleaner world.

According to analysts at global market research store Research and Markets, stats from Recycling International reveal that in 2019, South Africa sent around 95 million tons of waste to its 826 landfill sites, and less than 40% of the

Recycling for all

Packa-Ching is a campaign started by local company Polyco, which focuses on plastic recycling in South Africa. At recycling parks in designated communities on a weekly basis, community members sell their plastic, paper, glass and metal waste to the truck driver at set prices per kilogram, and the money is paid into their eWallets. This clever initiative incentivises recycling in areas where there is often much litter lying around, by adding a monetary reward.

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materials were recycled. It's not all bad news, however, in that recycling of plastics 'continues to grow'. The average recycling rate for SA exceeds 43%, which is higher than Europe's figure of 31%. Collect-A-Can companies (there are 32) jointly collect about 72% of all beverage cans annually, and more than 75% of metal packaging was recovered in 2019.

Recycling waste prolongs the lifespan of these materials, but it also reveals the value of refuse, boosts the economy and can even provide a little income for the informal sector.

Here are some tips to optimise your recycling:

Recycle all paper, cardboard, plastic bottles and containers, glass bottles and jars, aluminium cans, and foil and steel tins.

Take your **eWaste** (anything that runs on batteries or electricity), to shops that have recycling bins for discarded equipment.

Old clothes and shoes do not belong in your recycling bin. Donate them to needy people, or if worn out, throw them in the waste bin.

Leave lids and labels on plastic bottles. The recycling process will remove these.

Take care not to put waste items that belong in the dustbin with your recyclable items.

Don't discard recyclables in plastic bags. Use a box or basket to carry these items to your recycling bin.

Compost food scraps. These can be used on your garden as fertiliser.

At the end of the day, the decisions we make each moment are either helping our environment or contributing to its destruction. By shifting our thinking, and behaving with renewed awareness about our environment, we can steer our actions positively. And while we might think that we can't really make a difference on our own, think again. If we, the readers, as well as our friends, family and colleagues, all took time to rethink, the positive impact could be profoundly. 😊

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Creating A Culture Of Wellness Together