



## RECYCLING

# NZ 'relying too heavily' on overseas markets for trash

David Williams  
Environment Reporter

New Zealand may be stuck with excess recycling material currently sent to Asia if it does not boost recycling efforts at home, the packaging industry warns.

Kiwis recycled 14.5 per cent more packaging in 2007 than in 2005, thanks, in part, to better kerbside collections and greater public awareness, the Packaging Council of New Zealand said.

However, council chief executive Paul Curtis warned there must be more effort to use recycled materials in New Zealand.

He said "much more than half" of New Zealand's packaging recycling went to Asia as higher commodity prices, particularly in China, had driven up demand and opened new markets for goods previously not able to be recovered.

Prices for recovered plastics jumped 62% in the last year.

Curtis said there was a danger in relying too heavily on overseas commodity markets.

"At some point in time they may say, 'We've got a lot of our own waste and we don't need yours,'" he said. "We need recycling infrastruc-

ture in place, not just in New Zealand, but also in other parts of the world, to ensure we're not left with the stuff."

In New Zealand in 2007, about 60% of packaging was recycled, more than in Australia and the European Union. Aluminium led the way at 88%, followed by paper (78%), glass (62%), steel (47%) and plastics (23%).

However, less paper, plastics and steel were recycled than in 2006, with steel dropping by 10 percentage points in one year.

All materials now had met voluntary five-year targets a year early.

While the packaging industry will not immediately be affected by the Waste Minimisation Act, which had its third reading last Thursday, Environment Minister Trevor Mallard said packaging "may or may not" become a "priority product".

He said the challenge for the industry now was to further reduce the impact of packaging materials on landfills. "It would be wrong for us to feel complacent."

Glass Packaging Forum general manager John Webber said voluntary schemes were preferable to "being sent a demand to pay

additional taxes and compliance costs" – a swipe at the Waste Minimisation Act.

However, Greens co-leader Russel Norman said the Ministry for the Environment needed legislative teeth. "If the amount of packaging doesn't start to decline then we have to look at that – and it hasn't."

New Zealand was the third-highest per capita producer of rubbish in the world, behind the United States and Australia, Christchurch City Council principal sustainability adviser Tony Moore said in June.

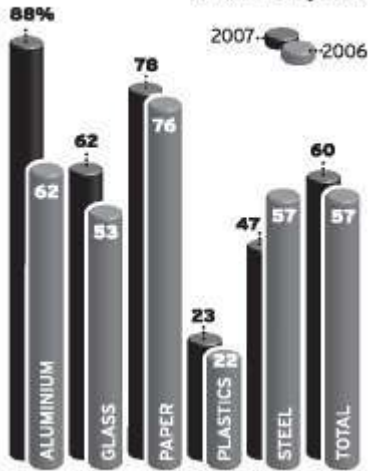
The city generated more than 1.28 million tonnes of waste last year, including 253,000 tonnes, most significantly food scraps and green waste, sent to the Kate Valley landfill.

The managing director of the Beccon commercial dry waste recovery facility in Bromley, Richard Lloyd, said about two-thirds of the commercial material at Kate Valley could be recycled.

Zero Waste New Zealand Trust manager Jo Knight said some industries were exporting recycling material and then buying it back and she would like to see New Zealand develop a "secondary waste industry".



**Recycling collection as percentage of consumption**



Rubbish: site operators Rueti Poihi, left, and Howard Chapman sort mixed plastics at META Processing in Christchurch. Photo: David Alexander