

Soil is the Solution

November 2009

The 6th Annual Zero Waste International Alliance conference in Puerto Princesa, the Philippines has demanded that governments of the world recognise that the only way to solve the Climate Change problems caused by humanity is to recapture carbon in the soils of the earth.

The highly successful International event held in association with Mother Earth Philippines and attended by over a thousand delegates over two days, (including delegates from Australia, Belgium, India, Italy, South Africa, Thailand, the UK and the US), has endorsed a resolution for presentation at the Copenhagen Climate Change talks in support of the return of all organic waste to the soil as high quality compost.

“We need to engage people all around the world and allow them to play their part in the solution to this problem facing all of humanity,” said Mother Earth National Chair, Sonia Mendoza.

“A key step in the zero waste strategy is to remove compostable organic materials from what we discard. Every one of us produces organic waste every day of our lives. If householders separate these materials for careful collection, we can provide the basic inputs for sustainable agriculture for our grandchildren,” she added.

The conference was told that the Mother Earth Foundation has encouraged and promoted very advanced but very simple compost programs in many barangays (the smallest administrative unit in the Philippines). The organisation is highly successful in the range of recycling programs it has established throughout the Philippines.

“The focus of our group is on local people, we have learned at this conference that Zero Waste groups around the world have this same focus and this presents us with a wonderful opportunity.” said Ms Mendoza.

Rick Anthony a spokesperson for the Zero Waste International Alliance (ZWIA), added that, “We have been all inspired by developments in the Philippines. We all recognise that the greed and over consumption of the wealthy nations has created this problem for our earth. This problem can only be solved through local communities working together and communicating with each other around the world.”

Ms Mendoza will be at the Copenhagen conference with a group of representatives from the Philippines and will be putting forward the resolution of the 6th Annual Zero Waste Conference that states that healthy fertile soil is the solution.

The final resolution reads:

In support of our children's children, we recognise that this generation has the responsibility to repair the damage caused by the human induced aspects of global warming.

The simplest, quickest and most cost-effective way to address global warming is to encourage every human being in the world to source separate the organic fraction from their discard streams, so that it can be composted and returned to agriculture. In this way the carbon can be captured in the soils of the earth.

We call upon all governments to pledge their support for making every city and every region of the world as independently sustainable as possible.

We further resolve that we encourage all citizens and grass roots organisations across the world to heed this message and do everything they can to persuade their local, state and national governments to take this critical step of composting the organics in the discard stream.

In short, to save our species we need to save our soil – soil is the solution.

Supporting document

Why Composting holds the key to solving four critical problems facing our planet:

- 1) Global climate change**
- 2) The depletion of soil of key nutrients**
- 3) Unemployment, especially in large cities**
- 4) Energy conservation**

1) Global Climate Change. By sequestering carbon in the soil, it reduces the global warming which would be otherwise caused by the carbon dioxide, released rapidly when this material is burned, or the methane that is more slowly released in landfills. Also, in as much as the addition of compost to soil, reduces the need for topsoil, derived from other sources like peat, and from energy intensive synthetic fertilizers, it further reduces global warming impacts.

2) Soil enrichment. It goes without saying that composting on a massive scale will replenish the depleted soils of vital minerals and other nutrients and therefore is of critical importance not only to agriculture but also to human health.

3) Unemployment. Once the organic fraction is removed from domestic waste the remaining material is far easier to store, handle and mine for its reusable objects and recyclable fraction. Once cities have removed organics from their discard stream it is a relatively easy task to use large warehouse type facilities to recover glass, metals, plastics, wood, ceramics etc and create both large and small businesses and a large number of jobs in the process. In Brescia, Italy the city leaders spent over 300 million Euros to build a giant incinerator that only produced 80 full-time jobs. In Nova Scotia (a province of Canada) spent far less money on a curbside collection program for compostables and recyclables, and created 1000 jobs collecting and handling the

discarded materials and another 2000 jobs in the industries using those secondary materials for re-manufacture.

4) Energy conservation. By expediting the recovery of more objects and materials for reuse and recycling, far more energy can be conserved (the embedded energy) when these materials and objects go back into commerce. Recycling reduces the energy involved in extraction and shipping primary materials around the globe; reuse of objects reduces both extraction impacts and manufacturing impacts. ICF, a Canadian consulting company, indicates that about 10 times more energy is saved recycling plastics than obtained by burning them to produce electricity and for one particular plastic, PET, 26 times more energy is saved. Overall Jeffrey Morris indicates that 4 times more energy is saved by recycling the total domestic waste stream than obtained by burning it to produce electricity.

Relating back to issue 1, overall, a report from Europe indicates that a combination of recycling and composting reduces the emissions of global warming gases as much as 46 times more than incineration producing electricity (AEA, 2001).

People need good food, clean air, clean water, clean air and strong communities. Zero Waste offers all of these, but will the world heed this message in time?