

NEW ZEALAND POST MANAGEMENT EXCELLENCE AWARDS

Applicant: Hutt City Council

Category: New Zealand Post Community Relationships Award

Introduction

The disposal of solid waste is an essential service which all communities need, but usually do not want in their neighbourhood. Hutt City Council (HCC) has operated a landfill at its Silverstream site since 1973. The current Silverstream Landfill is due to reach its capacity in 2007 when it would effectively be closed. To continue to provide a solid waste disposal service to the residents of the Hutt Valley, HCC investigated building a new landfill, located on the same site, but down valley from the existing operating area.

We identified an opportunity to build a landfill at this site with sufficient capacity to meet community needs for the next 50 years. The landfill would be designed to meet best practice requirements and satisfy the Ministry for the Environment's Class A landfill criteria.

The operation of the Silverstream Landfill had, over the previous 30 years, received little adverse public comment. HCC was therefore of the belief that landfill operation was of a reasonable standard and caused minimal problems. On this basis, Council started the consultation process for the new landfill. However, at a public meeting held to introduce the concept of the new landfill, HCC met considerable opposition, based on dissatisfaction with current operating standards and practices. This required HCC to review the processes by which it would undertake the design and obtain the resource consents for the new landfill and, in particular, to make substantial improvements to its relationship with the community.

This application for the New Zealand Post Management Excellence Award – Community Relationships, describes the community consultation undertaken to obtain the resource consents for the new Silverstream Landfill and the development of a basis for a long-term relationship allowing community involvement in the operation of a major solid waste disposal facility.

A summary of the project and the application for resource consents is attached.

1. NEED

This issue is examined in terms of both the need for the landfill, and the need to develop a strong and effective relationship with the community.

The need for the new Silverstream Landfill is driven by a number of factors which include:

- HCC's responsibility under the Local Government Act to ensure availability of an effective solid waste disposal service.
- HCC's recognition of industry as an important component to the City and the need to provide a cost-effective service as part of HCC's vision to attract new business and maintain existing businesses.
- There are no Class A landfills in the Wellington Region. This limits potential industrial growth, because of increased requirements for responsible waste disposal.
- HCC's commitment to sustainable management in waste disposal.
- An independent study of waste disposal options for the Wellington Region identified that a regional landfill at Silverstream was the optimum situation.
- The Wellington Regional Council's Regional Policy Statement has identified that regional landfills servicing a number of communities are preferable.
- The operation of the Silverstream Landfill has been used to generate income to cover the cost of recycling activities in both Lower and Upper Hutt Cities, and to cover environmental education, and waste minimisation programmes. The cost of these activities is approximately \$800,000 per year.

The need to establish an effective community relationship is important for the following reasons:

- Community feedback is needed to assist in designing the landfill and in particular, the mitigation measures.
- Community feedback is required to assist in meeting consultation obligations under the Resource Management Act.
- An effective relationship can avoid the need for and associated costs of a resource consent hearing and appeals to the Environment Court.
- An effective relationship can assist in monitoring the performance of the landfill once operational.
- Community feedback is needed to guide HCC in fulfilling its objective to be a good neighbour.

2. EFFECTIVE PROJECT MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES

At the outset of developing a strategy for community consultation, HCC recognised that the management of the consultation process needed to be responsive to community concerns, flexible, technically authoritative and empowered. To achieve this, the following techniques were employed:

- Establishment of a core project management team comprising a senior Council official, a landfill design expert, and an environmental management expert, to prepare the consultation strategy and to engage with the community.
- HCC's senior official was empowered to make decisions on behalf of the Council.
- A close relationship was developed with staff of the consent authority (Greater Wellington Regional Council) and they were kept informed of the outcomes of all meetings with the community.
- HCC was clearly identified as the proponent of the project and was the "public face" for the new landfill.
- Resources were made available to consider all community concerns.
- Regular reviews were made of progress; in particular, the effectiveness of the consultation strategy.
- International experts were used to peer review the landfill design, with the outcome being provided to all parties.

3. PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

To ensure effective engagement with the community, HCC recognised that there needed to be a number of ways to enable the local community to obtain information about the new landfill and to provide comment. An essential part of ensuring participation by the local community was to involve them in the design of the improvements of the current landfill operation.

To ensure participation by the local community and to establish a meaningful relationship, the following actions were undertaken:

- Regular meetings with the local community to provide information and receive feedback.
- Establishment of a Community Liaison Group early in the consultation process. The Community Liaison Group was used to provide detailed feedback on development options.
- A commitment to take seriously all issues raised by the community and provide responses on these issues by the relevant technical experts.
- The establishment of a website to provide information on the project, including all reports.
- Involving the Liaison Group in the improvement of current landfill operations by developing a "task list" of required improvements, including on the list those

issues raised by the community, and providing regular task list updates to the Liaison Group so they could monitor, and be assured of, progress toward resolution of all such issues.

- Establishing a mechanism for interaction between the community, and the company employed by HCC to run the landfill.
- Involving the community in establishing a Charter that committed HCC to being a “good neighbour” in the future operation of the landfill.
- Continuing the consultation process beyond the statutory requirements of the Resource Management Act.

While this approach was principally focussed on the local community and landfill neighbours, aspects also “spilt over” into consultation with other interested parties such as DOC, Iwi, Fish and Game, and the Medical Officer of Health.

4. INNOVATION AND ORIGINALITY

It would be misleading to suggest that HCC could claim credit for ideas and techniques it employed in developing its relationship with the community. It has, however, modified a number of commonly used ideas for this particular project. It has also used suggestions from the local communities. Activities that the Council has undertaken that could be classified as original or innovative are:

- Taking the Community Liaison Group to visit “modern landfills” operating elsewhere in New Zealand.
- Linking HCC’s website for the new landfill with the local community’s website and providing the ability for local residents to record on the website their comments and concerns.
- Having an open day at the current landfill to demonstrate improvements in performance.
- Reporting back regularly to the local community on improvements to current landfill operations.
- The development of a Charter between the community and HCC recognising their joint interests and participation in the future operation of the landfill.
- Developing a design for the new landfill to a higher standard than that required by current best practice options.

5. SUCCESSFUL RESULTS

The success of the relationship forged with the local community can be measured in a number of ways. The success can be considered in terms of the quality of the relationship established with the local community and the commitment to work together in respect of the operation of the new landfill. The “turnaround” in the relationship between Council and the local community is evidenced in that after initial strong opposition, the Liaison Group actually made a submission to the Consenting Authority in favour of the new development.

This has translated into overall success in regard to the project, in that the relationship resulted in the resource consents being granted without the need for a hearing by the Consent Authority, let alone the Environment Court. This is extremely unusual for a project which is usually considered to be a NIMBY (“not in my back yard”). No other new large-scale landfill in New Zealand has obtained resource consents without a need for a resource consent hearing. This outcome has provided significant savings in both time and money for HCC as well as cementing positive community relationships and ensuring a high quality landfill development. The significance of this success is demonstrated by two letters of commendation (attached) from:

- 1) Greater Wellington Regional Council; and
- 2) Fish and Game.

6. WAS THE PROJECT A WISE CHOICE?

Undoubtedly, the project can be considered a success demonstrated by the establishment of a relationship with the local community that will continue over the life of the landfill.

The obtaining of resource consents allows HCC to provide solid waste disposal services to the community and to fund its recycling and waste minimisation activities into the future.

Rik Hart
Chief Executive
Hutt City Council

Attachments:

- Letter from Wellington Regional Council
- Letter from Fish and Game
- Hutt City Council – Silverstream Landfill Stage 2: Summary of Application
(Report by Tonkin & Taylor, November 2003)