

Recycling needs to become a part of SA culture

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Sappi's well-known waste paper bins have a brand new 'purpose'. They are used as collection points all over Newcastle, in KwaZulu-Natal, where people can donate their unwanted shoes to the local Rotary Club's 'Sole Struck Shoe Project'.

The waste paper bins were recently handed over to the Newcastle Majuba Rotary Club by Holland-born Nel Vuyk, owner of Waste Salvage - a local waste paper agent of Sappi's ReFibre waste management division. Vuyk and her family moved to South Africa 17 years ago to take over the Newcastle-based recycling business. It was a perfect fit for Vuyk, because she grew up within a recycling culture.

"That is what's missing in South Africa," she says. "In Holland, due to the lack of space, recycling is a necessity. We can't do without it. I remember how we used to go to the recycling depot as kids to trade in our newspapers for cash. We grew up being recycling-conscious."

It's not the same in South Africa. "Here space isn't an issue, so people simply dig a hole and that becomes their new dumping site." Vuyk's company collects 100 tons of recyclable cardboard and 10 tonnes each of plastic and paper every month - an indication that Newcastlers are keen on recycling. But South Africans in general still have a long way to go.

"It's all about making a conscious choice to create less waste and dispose of recyclable waste in the right way. If every person, in every household can commit to this, we will soon have a cleaner society - and save on resources," says Vuyk.

Recycled material is an excellent fibre resource for the manufacturing of new products. The cardboard waste from Sappi's network of agents re-enters the manufacturing cycle to produce containerboard for the packaging industry. Sappi Cape Kraft Mill in the Western Cape, for example, uses 100% recycled fibre in its production of linerboard and fluting medium. The mill uses approximately 67,000 tons of waste paper a year. Sappi's Enstra Mill in Gauteng also uses recycled paper in the making of linerboard, while the Tugela (KwaZulu-Natal) and Ngodwana Mills (Mpumalanga) use a percentage of paper waste in its production processes.

With over 20% market share in the local recycling industry, Sappi is also doing its bit for job creation and economic empowerment. The company has helped over 80% of its 70 agents to set up and sustain their businesses by supplying the necessary equipment and know-how. Many of these entrepreneurs, like Vuyk's Waste Salvage, have been in operation for over a decade. Collectively, these agents supply Sappi with 275,000 tons of recyclable cardboard a year.

But much more waste could re-enter the production chain across a number of industries, including paper, glass, plastic, aluminium, ink and toner cartridges and computer consumables. All it takes is consumers who are passionate about recycling.

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