

# Get on the Recycling Cycle

The first step towards a greener and cleaner environment in our daily lives is the practice of three R's-Reduce, Reuse and Recycle. **Clinton Vaz** explores the concept of recycling that can give rise to many benefits.

Summer sun down on my back and slurping away some vanilla ice cream, I found myself laying in a green meadow, engaged in a deep conversation on the subject of 'recycling' with a close friend in Sweden. We were just back from an environmental discussion about consumerism and we were both upset about the continual increasing quantum of waste being produced by us humans world over.

While I still think that we ought to first reduce our unnecessary consumption and reuse stuff as far as possible, the concept of recycling makes sustainable sense rather than disposing non-organic waste in any other way.

"Here in Sweden, we try to recycle as much as we can," explained my friend. She continued, "We put in our waste into different bins, and the municipality comes by and picks it away. Even bigger items like furniture and electronic appliances get recycled, but then we need to take it to a recycling center instead."

I've always tried to find out what happens to inorganic waste in every country that I visit and so, during my travels, I had seen many of these systems operate. In the city of Gothenburg in western Sweden, citizens pay a fixed fee to the municipality for recycling. Similarly, in Zurich, Switzerland, citizens pay as per the quantum of recyclable waste that they individually generate and the city authorities recycle waste for their citizens. In all cases, including in Portugal and Germany, the system worked only if people separated their waste into different categories. Countries similar to ours like Nepal and Egypt may seem years away from catching up, however this is where a lot of interesting developments by concerned individuals seem to take place in the field of recycling.

My friends there were surprised to know that here in India, it is the other way around. Here, we don't have any recycling system supported or set up by the government. And while we wait for that to happen, a few concerned citizens have already setup informal recycling systems that work better than



The recycling centre in Panjim.

the west. My friend however, was most interested to learn that we actually get paid, to get rid of most of our recyclable waste!!

The difference is that recycling is not some new trend or some kind of activity that is imposed by law, as in the west. Here in India, it is a way of life. Recycling seems to be embedded in our Indian genes! Here everybody recycles newspapers to the nearby grocer, and ensures that old clothes are reused by the less fortunate. In

## Eco Talk

the villages, we sell our plastics, metals and glass to waste pickers.

But there have been problems. City dwellers have long disregarded these practices, and rather dispose everything in one big bag, citing lack of time. The recycling industry is blacklisted, and often blamed for causing local environmental pollution. Those interested in recycling usually do not know how to go about it. The fact is that there is a vast informal recycling industry in India that needs to be supported, improved and upgraded.

Provided you separate your waste into a minimum of two fractions, recyclers will pay

citizens (per kg) about Rs 3-5 for paper/newspaper,

Rs 4-6 for cardboard, Rs 0.50-1.20 for coloured/uncoloured glass, Rs 8-10 for hard plastics and general metals, Rs 8-10 for PET Bottles, and higher values for specific metals. Rs 70-75 for Aluminum, Rs 150-170 for brass and Rs 230-250 for Copper!! Recyclers in Goa are even willing to pick up these fractions from your doorstep provided you (or your community) have accumulated a cycle load or rickshaw load of waste before calling them.

While some might argue that the focus of recycling ought to be more on reducing waste rather than making money, demanding this minimum amount of monetary refund for your waste is a very important step in supporting this recycling industry.

Firstly, recyclable fractions anyway have higher monetary values attached; therefore you are simply taking advantage of a small fraction of this value. Fixing values for each recyclable fraction also prevents unscrupulous recyclers from picking up mixed waste altogether and then dumping the non-recyclable fractions in the open environment. This therefore, reduces environmental pollution by the recycling industry as

waste is more streamlined. Source separated waste is more profitable and less hazardous for the rag picker as opposed to rummaging through mixed waste in community bins that might contain sharps or disease. Finally, this additional money, obtained from recycling can also go towards your own households waste management infrastructure such as waste bins or a compost bin. Thus, in this way, everybody benefits, and recycling pays for itself to become a sustainable system.

Recycling also can happen with the assistance of Green Manufacturers & Producers. In Goa we have quite a few examples. Beer manufacturers in Goa take back empty bottles, providing a refund of Rs 4-5 per bottle.

The Goa Dairy offers to take back used milk bags in exchange for a pack of milk. Hundred washed clean milk bags can be bundled and handed over to any Goa Dairy milk booth in Goa in exchange for a free milk packet.

A joint collaboration by a few NGOs, Pepsi, CocaCola and Bisleri offer to take back used PET Bottles and clean plastic bags in exchange for a monetary refund. PET Bottles over 1litre fetch Rs 0.30 each. PET Bottles under 1litre fetch Rs 0.15 each while a kg of clean plastic bags fetch Rs 6 per kg at the collection centers established in Colva, Margao, Panjim and Calangute. While both these initiatives have started since 2001, most Goans remain unaware, as publicity has been poor.

Since 2006, TetraPak takes back their drink carton waste at a collection center in Panjim while Titan takes back its watch batteries at all their service centers in Goa since 2007.

Recycling centers exist all over Goa, with most of them located around bigger cities. Visit one such recycler and give him your recyclable waste.

Please contact me if you need specific details or if you need any assistance while using any of the services mentioned above.

Let's hear from you! Email [klintvaz@gmail.com](mailto:klintvaz@gmail.com) or [arati05@gmail.com](mailto:arati05@gmail.com). You can even post a letter to us at 'Goa Going Green' C/o Arti Das, Gomantak Times, Gomantak Bhavan, St Inez, Panjim, Goa.



Recycling glass in Zurich, Switzerland.