

PACWASTE COUNTRY PROFILE

COOK ISLANDS

Photo: SPREP archive

PacWaste is a four year project (2014–2017) funded by the European Union and implemented by the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), to improve regional hazardous waste management across the Pacific in the priority areas of healthcare waste, asbestos waste, E-waste and integrated atoll waste management.

A further priority for PacWaste is to foster links between Pacific island countries and encourage information sharing on sustainable waste management through regional collaboration and twinning arrangements.

Cook Islands is one of 15 countries participating in PacWaste, with activities taking place in the project domains of healthcare waste, E-waste and asbestos.

Healthcare waste

PacWaste is working across 15 countries to improve the management of healthcare waste. Healthcare waste is hazardous because it has the potential to be infectious or harmful to humans and the environment.

In Cook Islands, PacWaste conducted a healthcare waste management baseline survey in April 2014, through which information was collected on current waste management processes, from ward-level waste generation through to treatment and disposal. Audits were conducted at the two largest hospitals in Cook Islands: Rarotonga General Hospital (Rarotonga) and Aitutaki District Hospital (Aitutaki).

The survey singled out Rarotonga General Hospital as one of the best facilities observed in region in terms of infection control and waste management. Aitutaki District Hospital, in contrast, was found to have a number of deficiencies with regard to healthcare waste management, although staff had previously identified this as an issue and were keen to learn what they should do to improve it.

Waste segregation and disposal at Aitutaki was identified as the hospital's major issue with medical waste being burnt on a concrete burning block and buried nearby, or left untreated and in the open for significant periods of time.

To address these needs, PacWaste will conduct specialised training in healthcare waste management across both sites and purchase a new high temperature incinerator for Aitutaki District Hospital.

PacWaste is also providing equipment and healthcare waste management training for staff at both the facilities surveyed. This will include the provision of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), signage and secure storage systems for

different waste types. Assistance will also be provided in developing a national healthcare waste management strategy.

Asbestos

PacWaste is working across 13 Pacific countries to address the issue of asbestos – a naturally occurring fibrous mineral that was once commonly used in building materials and other consumer items. Asbestos is now banned from most modern products as it has been found to be a major threat to human health.

In Cook Islands, PacWaste conducted a baseline asbestos survey in July and August of 2014 to determine the prevalence of asbestos, ascertain risks associated with the materials and identify best practice options for cost-effective and sustainable interventions.

The survey found a substantial amount of asbestos in the Cook Islands, including numerous examples of old asbestos buildings in poor condition and several sites (including schools) with asbestos debris.

Following the application of an asbestos assessment risk methodology, PacWaste has committed to the removal, secure transport and safe disposal of around 4,000m² of asbestos from 22 sites – mainly schools – across Rarotonga, Aitutaki, Atiu, Mangaia, Mauke and Mitiaro. Further to this, Cook Islands will be targeted in a regional public awareness campaign about asbestos risk and the steps that can be taken to minimise exposure.

E-waste

The rapidly increasing use of electrical and electronic equipment in the Pacific is resulting in increased volume of E-waste. Dumped E-waste can release harmful contaminants into the environment such as lead, cadmium and dioxins. The good news is that many end of life electronic items contain recoverable and valuable components such as copper, steel and gold.

Regionally, PacWaste is collecting information about current E-waste management and stockpiles across nine Pacific island countries to assist in the improved management of E-waste in the region.

In Cook Islands, PacWaste will launch an E-waste pilot project through which training will be provided in how to safely extract and export valuable or hazardous materials from old electronic and computer equipment. Shipping and logistical support will also be given to enable the processed E-scrap to be exported internationally.



PacWaste Actions and Impact: Cook Islands

ACTION	LOCATION	IMPACT
Healthcare waste		
Healthcare waste baseline survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rarotonga General Hospital (Rarotonga) Aitutaki District Hospital (Aitutaki) 	Baseline data on the current status of healthcare waste management is publically available.
Provision and installation of high temperature healthcare waste incinerators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aitutaki District Hospital (Aitutaki) 	Healthcare facilities have increased capacity for the proper disposal of healthcare waste.
Incinerator operator training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aitutaki District Hospital (Aitutaki) 	Incinerator operators have the necessary skills to operate and maintain equipment.
Healthcare waste management training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rarotonga General Hospital (Rarotonga) Aitutaki District Hospital (Aitutaki) 	Healthcare facilities can effectively and safely handle their waste from point of creation through to disposal.
Provision of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), signage and secure storage systems.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rarotonga General Hospital (Rarotonga) Aitutaki District Hospital (Aitutaki) 	Healthcare facilities have improved storage facilities for healthcare waste and an integrated system of ensuring that wastes are clearly identified.
Assistance in developing a national healthcare waste strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National 	Healthcare waste management is prioritised at the national level in accordance with best practice.
Asbestos		
Asbestos baseline survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rarotonga Aitutaki 	Detailed information about the prevalence of asbestos is publically available.
Removal, transport and disposal of 4,000m ² of asbestos containing materials across 22 sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Avarua School (Rarotonga) Tereora College (Rarotonga) Takitumu School (Rarotonga) Arorangi School (Rarotonga) Avatea Primary School (Rarotonga) Nikao School (Rarotonga) Titikaveka College (Rarotonga) Rarotonga Airport (Rarotonga) Aitutaki District Hospital (Aitutaki) Araura College (Aitutaki) Araura Primary (Aitutaki) Tekaaroa School (Aitutaki) Laundry behind hospital (Aitu) Atiu Hospital (Atiu) Enuamanu School (Atiu) Old Government House (Mangaia) Ivirua School (Mangaia) Mangaia School (Mangaia) Packing Shed (Mauke) Old Hospital (Mauke) Mauke School (Mauke) Mitiaro School (Mitiaro) 	High risk asbestos is safely removed, reducing the risk of exposure to the general population.
Asbestos management training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rarotonga Aitutaki Atiu Mangaia Mauke Mitiaro 	Asbestos can be effectively and safely removed and disposed of in accordance with international best practice.
Asbestos public awareness campaign	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National 	Residents of Cook Islands are aware of asbestos risks and the steps that can be taken to minimise exposure.
Assistance in developing a national asbestos strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National 	Asbestos management is prioritised at the national level in accordance with best practice.
E-waste		
E-waste pilot project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rarotonga 	Workers are further trained in how to safely extract and export valuable or hazardous materials from E-waste.
E-waste public awareness campaign	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National 	Residents are aware of their options for safely disposing of E-waste.
Assistance in developing a national E-waste strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rarotonga 	E-waste management is prioritised at the national level in accordance with best practice.
Information sharing, regional collaboration and twinning		
Connection to a developing recycler's network.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regional 	Opportunities are opened up for recycling materials such as scrap steel, plastics, E-waste, and Used Lead Acid Batteries.
Provision of resources, guidance materials and participation in regional workshops and other events.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regional 	Relevant national personnel have an improved understanding of best practice solutions for solid and hazardous waste management in the Pacific.



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The Pacific environment – sustaining our livelihoods and natural heritage in harmony with our cultures.

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For more information

Detailed information about PacWaste activities in Cook Islands, including baseline survey reports, are available at: www.sprep.org/pacwaste