

ILO training keeps Fiji green and clean

By Surkafa Katafono, National Programme Officer, ILO Country Office for Pacific Island Countries

(Nadi, Fiji) Waste collectors and townspeople in the western towns of Nadi and Lautoka are enjoying better, safer and greener conditions, thanks to the guidance contained in the first programme to combine 'green' environmental support measures with occupational safety and health (OSH) techniques.

The Work Adjustment for Recycling and Managing Waste (WARM) manual and training programme were developed by ILO OSH experts specifically to suit local conditions, improve the workers' health and safety and make them more aware of the importance of recycling and other environmental support measures. A year after the pilot training for the Nadi and Lautoka Town Councils' waste management contractors, the changes can be seen in both the daily routine of waste collectors and conditions on the rubbish truck pick-up route.

The waste management workers now routinely follow a simple action checklist that reminds them of the WARM principles and how to work properly and safely in recycling and managing waste. They know the importance of sorting and recycling waste, and being environmental friendly. The workers' daily routine includes five minutes of body stretches before work, putting on their basic personal protection equipment such as overalls, gloves and boots, and maintaining proper cleanliness in their work station, the truck and themselves.

The new approach has now had time to prove itself and its success means the WARM programme is now being widely adopted by the town councils and their contractors. Premila Chandra, Director of the Health Department in Nadi Town Council, says the WARM techniques have been very useful. "The waste collectors now wear protective gear, they exercise daily, are careful with cleanliness, work in pairs and watch for heavy bins. We have noticed the changes in the manner the waste pickers are now handling the bins and taking all precautions to avoid accidents," she said. As well as training for new contractors, her department also conducts refresher courses, to reinforce the standards of good and safe working practices.

The WARM programme was developed with support from the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). Its defining characteristic is the use of participatory, action-oriented training techniques, such as visits to waste collection facilities, and targets local residents and city government officials, as well as the waste collectors and their managers.

The new contractors could see for themselves that the manual was developed locally and they could identify with all the check-points in the manual. The approach of using step-by-step, incremental improvements encouraged them because the small, cost-effective steps were not too daunting. Early successes with small changes enabled them to take on larger challenges and they could see how such small adjustments could lead to greater, long-term gains.

For the workers, the use of pictures was a great help because some of the older workers had a limited knowledge of English. The step-by-step approach also helped them adapt to safer ways of operating. For example, one worker who did not like wearing a cap is slowly changing his behaviour and is now wearing one. Another who avoided wearing gloves because they were 'too big' has now found gloves that he can work in, and wears them.

Networking with the wider Nadi community is the second element in the success of the WARM approach to managing waste and improving environmental standards. The community has stakeholder groups and community networks that work with the Nadi Town Council, meeting to discuss progress and to provide feedback on waste-management issues. These groups also encourage residents to help the waste-management contractors, by putting rubbish in proper rubbish bins, placing waste bags on waist-level platforms so that scavenging dogs can't reach them, and keeping dogs behind gates or chained up so that the contractors can work unhindered.

Terence O'Neil, Chief Executive Officer of the Nadi Town Council was a member of the waste-management network and took part in the WARM project training. "Our people started to think twice about what to put their waste in, where and how high to place the waste, keep dogs away from waste bags and so forth. Furthermore, we became partners and understood the work of the waste collectors," he said.

Reduce, reuse and recycle continues to play an important role in people's lives in Fiji. People in western towns of Nadi now daily put scrap food into compost heaps and place recyclable bottles and cans in properly marked containers.

Challenges remain; for example some households still put broken glass and bottles into their trash, rubbish falls off trucks and trucks and refuse collectors have a time-schedule to keep up with. However the Nadi Town Council is pleased with progress and is planning to work with the ILO on similar projects in the future.

Tsuyoshi Kawakami and Ton That Kai, ILO OSH experts who conducted the pilot training and co-authored the manual are also pleased with the progress so far. Dr Kawakami said, "In future, we would like to expand the scope of WARM training in a step-wise manner to support better safety, health and working conditions of other waste collectors, including informal waste pickers, scavengers in the dumping site and workers in the recycling industry".

Click here for the [WARM Manual](#) and for information on [Safe Work](#).