

An Environmental Educational Awareness Initiative– Coolagown Village 2009

Coolagown is one of 16 Villages of Tradition in the Blackwater Area with a current population of approx 120. The Village has participated in a number of Village

Enhancement
Programmes
administered by
Avondhu-
Blackwater-
Partnership.

Coolagown
Development
Group was formed
in 1991. Their aim



Blackwater Resources “Villages of Tradition”



at this time was to enhance the village and revitalise the area. Since then, the group has completed a number of successful projects e.g. starting with a group water scheme in 1992 to the new recent extension to Kilmagner School in 2009. Coolagown won Gold Medals in the National Tidy Towns competition in 2008 & 2009.

Coolagown Development Group has worked closely with Cork County Council and Avondhu –Blackwater – Partnership Leader group. From 1997 – 2003 to 2008, their Development Plan has successfully enhanced this village.

A summary of the enhancements include landscaping the centre of village, building a forge and blacksmith (see photos below), development of an amenity area at Higgins’ Cross, development of a forestry walk in Kilbarry Wood. Information panels showing the history, heritage wildlife, fauna and flora of the

area have been erected throughout the area and more recently anti-litter educational signage supported by Environmental Awareness Unit at three locations.



Photo: Forge and Blacksmith

As participants in the Tidy Towns Competition their scores have increased each year, 235 marks in 2003 to 301 in 2009.

The judges comments were: This is a most pleasant village set in beautiful countryside. The community is making the most of its identification with the horse which obviously is deeply rooted in the area. But in addition to that a considerable amount of work has been done to enhance an already very attractive community.

The village has also supported a wide range of environmental projects and initiatives including, the Cork County Council Anti Litter Challenge competition. Coolagown won the North Cork section in 2004 with 381 out of 400 with a prize of €650. and beaten by 1 point in the County Final.

The village also competed in the Mhuintir Na Tire Pride of the Community challenge in 2004, finishing second in the Area Final and won €130.

Coolagown was nominated by Cork County Council in 2004 to take part in the 32 County Pride of Place competitions.

In 2009 Coolagown Development Group completed a Bio-Diversity study/plan for the 13 town lands in the Coolagown area totalling 5,500 acres.

They are presently recording the Built Heritage in these townlands.



Photo. Antilitter signed provided by Environmental Awareness Unit of Cork Co. Council.



Photo: Participants gather for distribution of green cones and composters.

2. A new challenge for Coolagown in waste prevention.

2.1 Overview

In support of Cork Co. Council's Waste Management Plan and the National Tidy Towns Competition (waste prevention theme), a project was initiated by Dr Mary Stack of Cork County Council's Environmental Awareness & Research Unit and Mr John Feeney Chairperson Coolagown Development Group.

The project designed as pilot for village communities, promoted waste prevention and behavioural change in dealing with household waste and the diversion of organic waste from landfill.

2.2 Aims of the programme

The two primary aims were:

The challenge of improving household waste management behaviour.

To educate households on how to reduce negative environmental impacts on their environment through waste prevention, energy and water conservation trainings.

2.3 Selected study group

Through the assistance of the Coolagown Development Group, 22 households signed up to participate in the project. Each household signed a pledge of commitment to the project.

2.4 Methodology used

2.4.1. Induction and training

A series of information meetings and trainings were organised by the Environmental Awareness Unit. This included the use of invited specialists from Cork Co. Council, An Taisce, ESB Customer services liaison officer, a BER Assessor and Mr Mike Holden, a facilitator & trainer specialising in environmental and sustainability issues.

All these specialist speakers influenced the group on how each household can contribute and live in a sustainable environment and how their small behavioural changes can have a positive impact on the environment. The information meetings were underpinned with an ecohomes training course [eight 2 hour training sessions and 1 on site practical].

The positive experiences experienced by the group in exposing them to experts both encouraged and induced behaviour changes amongst the participants. Focusing on themes such as ‘rethink, prevention, reduction, reuse, recycling and composting brought about changes in their daily waste management practices. The 12 month period for the project was an ideal length of time, allowing for induction, training, exercises, practical and evaluation.

2.4.2 Examples of behavioural changes to be adopted by the group.

Shopping habits

Making choices when shopping that will reduce packaging.

Buying loose fruit and vegetables, buy what you need.

Benefits to the environment on shopping locally, buying local produce to reduce air miles on their purchases.

Check use-by dates to avoid buying food that might get thrown out if not eaten immediately.

Reuse of household goods

Use of the Cork County Council's website 'wastematchers.com' and similar web sites e.g. freecycle.org.

Use of charity shops, free advertiser papers e.g. Tuesday's Evening Echo supplement.

Investigate setting up a local reuse centre in the village and a local reuse of quality household goods public information notice board.

Recycling Practices

Highlighting good recycling practices such as washing and crushing items and identification of what can and cannot be recycled.

Safe disposal practices

Promoting use of recycling centres.

Promote use of ChemCar service to ensure proper disposal of hazardous waste Promote use of the DUMP campaign for disposal of medicines.

Takeback schemes on spent batteries and electronic equipment.

Composting & food waste

Providing the participants with the necessary skills, knowledge and equipment to divert food and other perishable waste away from the residual waste stream into composting systems

Water conservation

Providing the participants with the necessary skills, knowledge and equipment to install water saving devices within their homes.

Encouraging the participants to make behaviour changes that will reduce their total amount of water use.

Energy Conservation

Encouraging participants to monitor their electricity usage using the wireless energy meters provided.

Encouraging the participants to make behaviour changes that will reduce their total amount of energy use.

2.4.3 Use of surveys

Two surveys were conducted at the start and end of the project. These surveys assisted with establishing information on the householder's waste management practices and the behavioural changes brought about through this educational programme.

2.5. Equipment for each household.

Each household was supplied with composting equipment, weighing scales and energy monitors and save a flush water saving device.

3. Results

3.1 Participants

21 households completed the course and exercises assigned to them.

3.2 Diversion of residual waste from landfill

- Residual waste sent to landfill decreased from 362 to 94 kg. This is very impressive when compared to the 440 kg Cork County average (pay by weight) and 740 kg national average [ref. Cork Co. Council internal research].
- 100% take up on home composting systems which include both the standard compost bin and a green cone per household.
- Only 7 % of perishable waste is still going to landfill and this figure is expected to fall with continuing diversion of cooked food waste to the green cones.

3.3 Water conservation

100% take up on the installation of the 'save a flush' device in toilet cisterns.

On the assumption that the average household flushes 15 times a day, a saving of approximately 5,500 litres per household per year will be achieved.

Many participants also fitted home made devices into their second toilets and undertook other water saving actions both in their homes and outdoor spaces.

3.4 Energy conservation

Wireless energy meters supplied to all participants were installed in all homes. Training on the use of the meters was given. Each household now carefully monitors their power consumption. Energy saving actions are being implemented.

4. Conclusions

This programme has demonstrated that diversion of residual waste from domestic households is possible through public educational awareness programmes. Some high weights will still arise where disposal nappies are in used. Persuading the householder to use real nappies is challenging. Composting of nappy waste is not recommended.

The success of this programme is accredited through the strategy of working with small communities groups where a one to one personnel contact is achieved. This invariably links to stakeholders like Avondhu/ Blackwater Partnership whose function is to support initiatives directed towards sustainable community development.

5. Recommendations

- 1) Similar environmental education awareness initiatives should be in piloted South and West Cork.
- 2) A follow on project be rolled out in second different community in North Cork
- 3) Compost demonstration sites should be set up in the three Divisions. This would be in keeping with the EPA's national composting programme. Currently only one Local Authority has a dedicated public compost training demonstration site
- 4) Encourage Tidy Town groups or other community based groups to take ownership of these demonstration sites mentioned in 3 above.
- 5) Provide resources to these groups to maintain the compost trial sites within their communities.

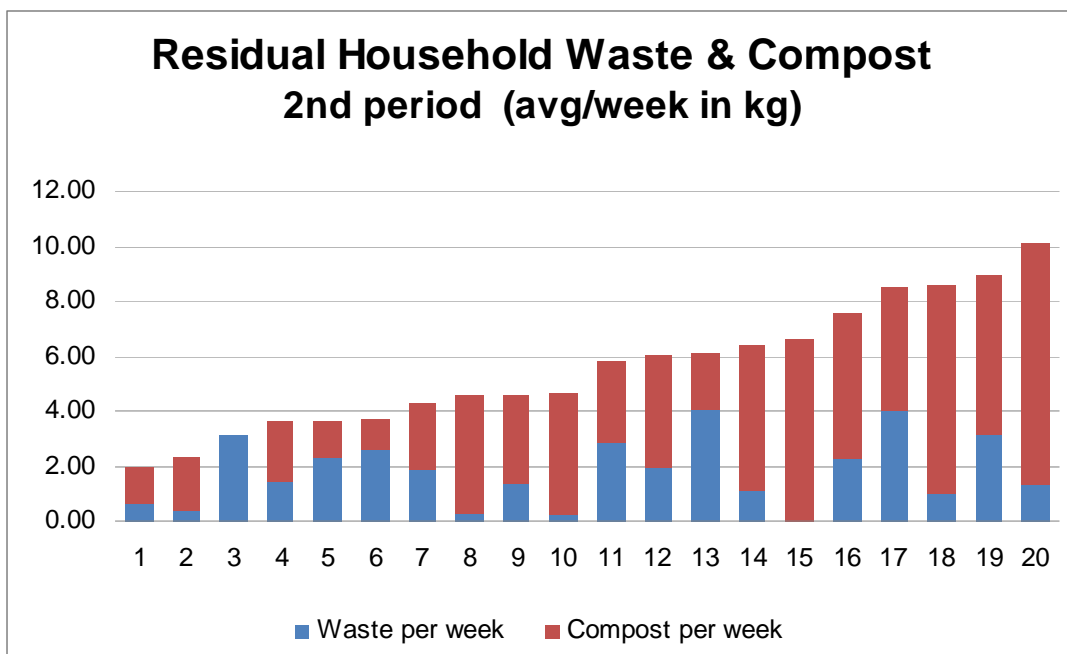
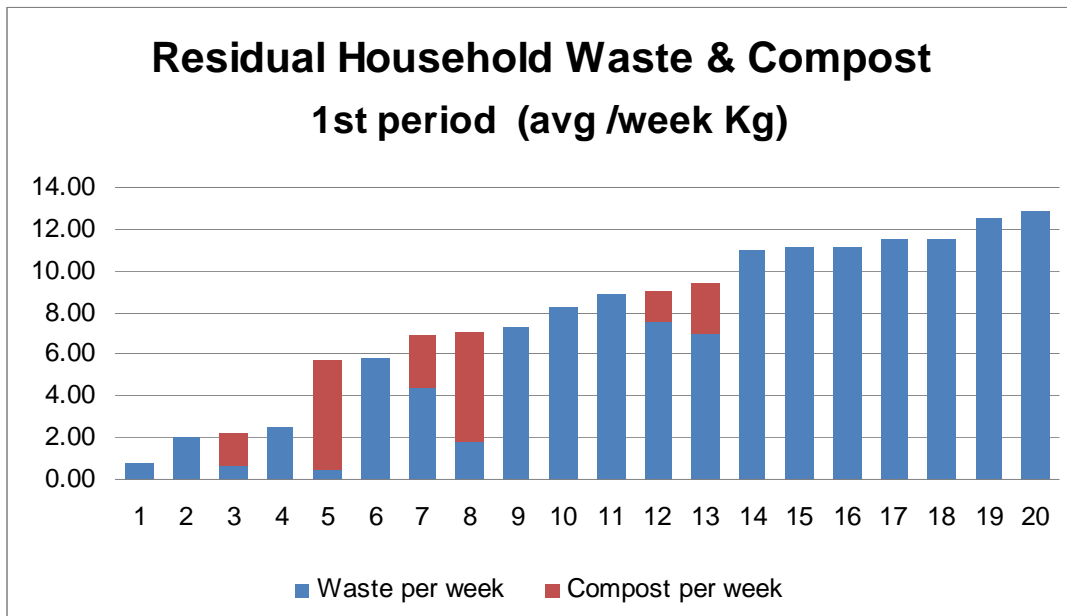
6. Acknowledgements

The project was funded via a partnership with the following entities;

- Cork Co. Council for providing;
 - the support of the Environmental Awareness Unit headed by Dr Mary Stack, Senior Executive Scientist. Dr Stack researched and developed this community based initiative,
 - the funding for trainer Mr Mike Holden. Mike is an independent facilitator who has worked closely with Cork Environmental Forum for the past six years delivering behaviour change and the ecohomes programme. The Ecohomes course material was designed and delivered by Mike Holden.
- Mr John Feeney and members of the Coolagown Development Group Committee for seeking this environmental challenge and promoting the project in the community.
- Avondhu Blackwater Partnership for supporting this project and providing grant aid to fund the purchase of composting vessels, energy meters and accessories.

Appendix Data

Fig. 1 & Fig 2



Figures 1 & 2 above illustrate the transition of participants (6 to 22) engaged in composting by the end of the programme.

Figs. 3-6: Survey on breakdown of food waste distribution at start of the programme.

Fig 3

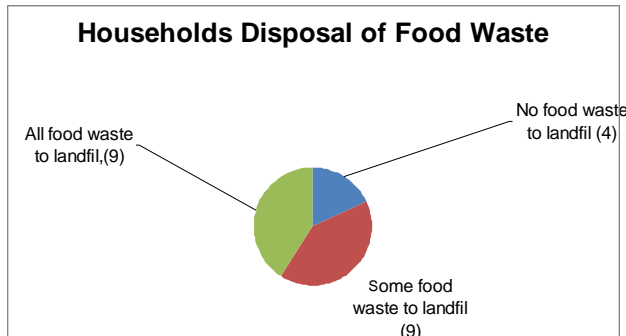


Fig 4

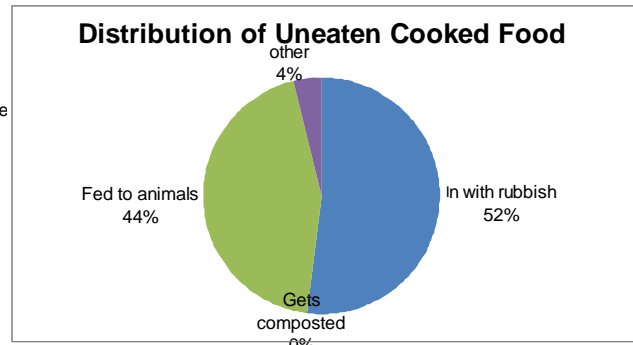


Fig. 5

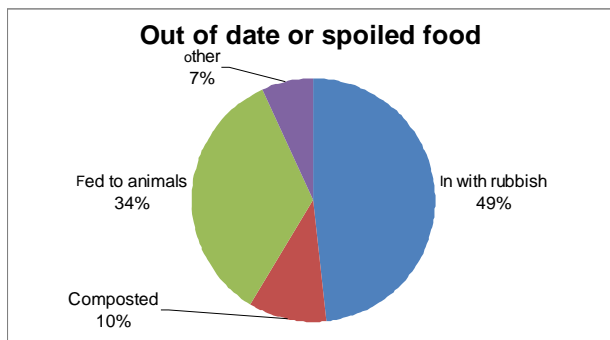


Fig 6

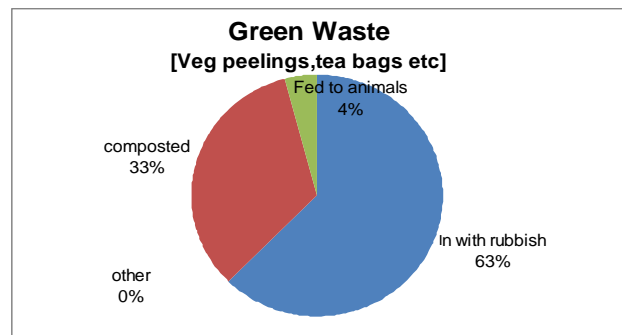


Figure 3-6 above illustrates householders practices in relation to the handling of food waste at the start of the programme.

Fig 7

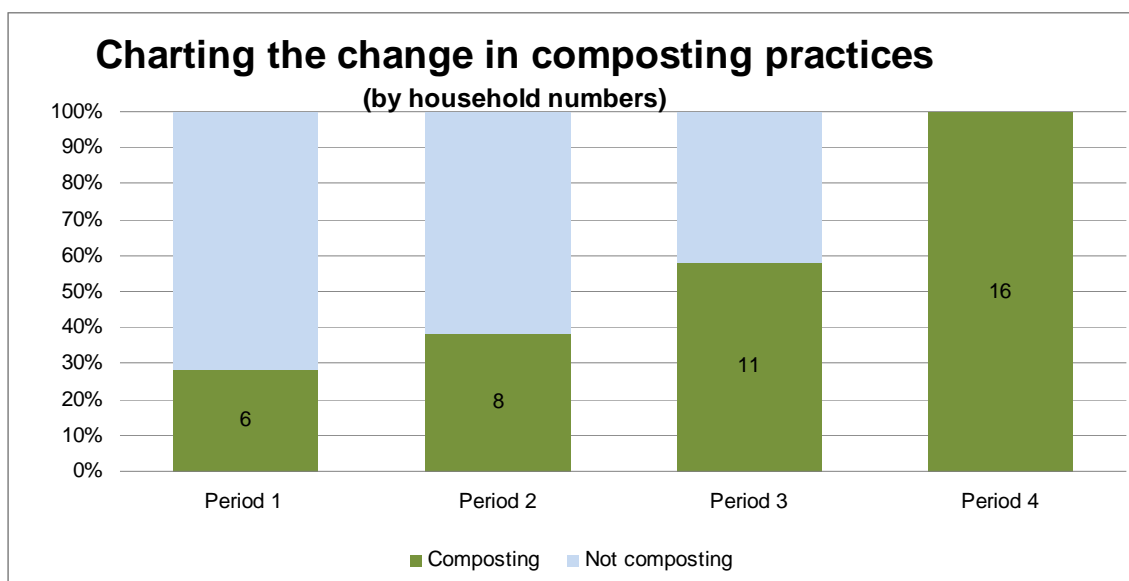


Figure 7 above illustrates the change in the number of households composting following the delivery and installation of compost bins, green cones.

Fig. 8

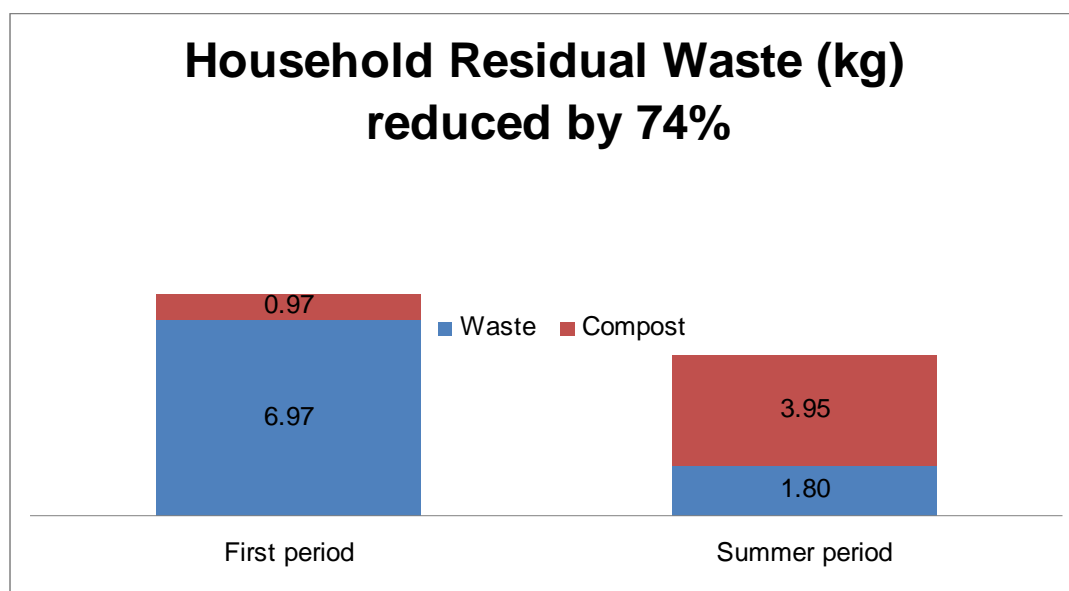


Figure 8 above illustrates the drop in residual waste going to landfill as the organic green and food waste fraction is separated out for composting and digestion.

Fig. 9

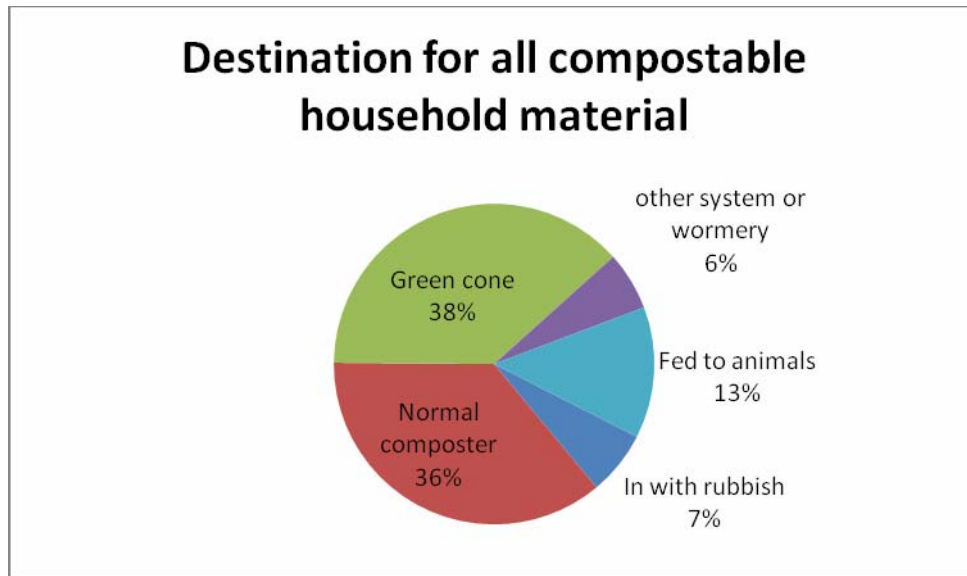


Figure 9 above suggests that the participants are correctly using the equipment by separating the cooked food waste from green waste.

The 7% 'in with rubbish' will be reduced further as one participant had not yet installed their green cone and was still sending 100% of cooked food waste to landfill.

Another participant had taken a cautious approach in order to not overload the composting systems and was still reducing the % sent to landfill.

Photo Gallery



Photo. Distribution of Composting bins and green cones.



Photo. Group site visit. Installation of green cones.



Photo. Information evening with assistance from Gareth Blake Energy office.



Photo. Full house at the first meeting January 2009.



Photo. Kick off meeting, Dr M Stack Environmental Awareness Unit, Ms Dorothy Stuart, An Taisce, Mr John Feeney Coolagown Development Group.

Some of the Participants Comments

- *I was already an enthusiastic composter but I got loads of tips and ideas from the course. Fantastic!*
- *I was a disgrace before the programme but now I have reduced my waste from 20Kg a week down to nothing. My bill has gone from €40 down to €17 a month. I should have done it years ago.*
- *I have reduced my rubbish to zero! The little that I do put out does not even register on the scales when the Council lorry weighs my waste bin*
- *The only thing that I am still putting out is ash from the fire and nappies. I wish there was something that could be done with the nappies*
- *I really enjoyed the programme, the green cone for me was the most preferred method and I have totally reduced what I would send out to the regular rubbish because of that. My only problem is that it is getting too full and I could probably use two of these.*

Press coverage

Coverage on National and local press and also wide spread coverage on local radio in Cork.

WEDNESDAY, JULY 1ST, 2009 - THE EAST CORK JOURNAL 26

Three-pronged approach pays dividends as Coolagown goes green: 22 households sign up to the scheme

DECLAN BARRON REPORTS



Local children are keen to try out their new recycling ideas as Valerie Mulcahy, CEO, Avondhu Blackwater Group, Dr. Mary Stack, Environmental Scientist with Cork County Council, Mike Holden, Environmental Trainer and John Feeney, Coolagown Development Group look on

Some of the local householders who are going to take part in the Eco-Schemes initiative, which has been piloted in Coolagown village

Two heads, they say, are better than one and, in this case, three heads are better than one as the Coolagown Development Group organisation core responsibilities include the delivery of the Rural months planning, preparation and community co-ordination by

* Instruction on their recycling lines can be disseminated to practices at home. How to iden- other communities throughout

Tidy Report 2009 extract

Waste Minimisation:

It is positive to find that the schools are well on their way to achieving green flag status and we know that the parents, teachers and children are learning best practice on the local environment, composting etc. I see you held seminars on waste minimisation in Coolagown in January and March, which had eminent guest speakers, and you are following up these seminars by running a pilot project, in conjunction with Cork County Council Environmental Education Unit, on the whole idea of Waste Minimisation and Energy Conservation, limited to 22 households. This together with extracts from the Biodiversity plan page 34 means that you have tackled the management and minimisation of waste in a very positive manner.

Tidiness:

Irish Examiner.com DATING

Village scheme leads the way in reducing waste

By Sean O'Riordan

Thursday, July 30, 2009

A PILOT waste reduction project being carried out in a small village in Co Cork looks set to become a model for the rest of the country.

Cork County Council picked 22 householders in Coolagown, near Fermoy, in north Cork, to take part in the scheme which started last January.

"I believe this could become a model for the whole country. Our remit is to divert waste from landfill and in a time where money is scarce it is a good opportunity for people to save on their bills," Dr Stack said.

John Feeney, chairman of Coolagown Development Group, said everybody involved was very impressed with the project.

"Our shopping habits have changed. We are far more aware of avoiding unnecessary packaging. It's the simple things that mean a lot," Mr Feeney said.

This story appeared in the printed version of the Irish Examiner Thursday, July 30, 2009

Corkman.ie

BILL BROWNE

Thursday July 23 2009

A PILOT project aimed at reducing carbon footprint has seen residents in the village of Coolagown reduce their waste output by a massive 80 per cent since January of this year.

A total of 22 homes in the north Cork village signed up for the Ecohomes waste minimisation project, an innovative Cork County Council sponsored scheme aimed at teaching locals about best waste management practise.

John Feeney, chairman of the Coolagown Development Group, said that the key to the scheme has been educating people in how to manage their waste production.

"Waste minimisation and carbon footprint are phrases that are used frequently but the reality of the matter is that few people really understand what they mean," said Mr Feeney.

"With this in mind the group decided to explore environmental options that would help local residents and businesses to reduce their waste and energy costs," he added.

The group contacted Dr Mary Stack of the council's Environmental Awareness and Research unit as to where they might start.

A series of meetings with environmental experts resulted in householders signing up for the Ecohomes scheme, which is grant aided through the Avondhu Blackwater Partnership.

Key to the scheme is the prevention and elimination of waste, in particular through the revision people's shopping habits.

The overall aim being to teach people to avoid excessive packaging and buy locally produced goods, thereby reducing the 'air miles and greenhouse gases' involved in transportation.

Participants are also using a variety of composting equipment, including an innovative new product nicknamed the 'green johanna', which allows them to compost both cooked and raw foods together.

Mr Feeney pointed out that the scheme has seen a dramatic reduction in the amount of household waste produced by participants, in some cases up to 80 per cent.

"This is a win-win situation for everybody. Householders have seen a huge reduction in costs through revised shopping habits and a significant reduction in the amount of waste going into the bin," said Mr Feeney.

"The big winner is the environment as less waste goes to landfill with the result that less greenhouse gases are produced," he added.

Report produced by Dr Mary Stack,
Environmental Awareness & Research Unit

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