

DPS Environmental Myth Buster—#5

“There’s heaps of space for rubbish; they can just dig more holes”.

Mugga Lane Landfill—Canberra’s only landfill site

Mugga Lane landfill is ACT’s only landfill. ACT NoWaste conservatively estimates that the Mugga Lane site only has capacity for another eight years worth of landfill.

ACT NoWaste has not identified any suitable new landfill sites. Once the Mugga Lane landfill closes, there are two options:

- (a) transport landfill waste interstate—a costly option which would also result in a greater environmental footprint through transport emissions; and/or
- (b) invest in new waste disposal technology (not landfill), which is likely to be costly. This option will require short-term interstate transportation while the technology is developed.

Why can’t they just dig more holes?

It is not as simple as that. Any site used for landfill requires careful long-term management:

- (a) Landfill produces toxic leachate, which is the liquid that leaks out of the landfill site. Run-off must be prevented, as it causes serious environmental degradation. At the Mugga Way landfill, the leachate is used within the grounds to help clear vegetation.
- (b) The profile of the landfill site changes over time as materials decompose. The potential for using a previous landfill site is very limited and it cannot be used for any sort of development.
- (c) Much of the waste disposed in a landfill is toxic. A landfill is a contaminated land site, and must be managed accordingly.

What can we do?

Recycle!

ACT NoWaste estimates that:

- (a) 50% of waste that goes to landfill in Canberra is recyclable. They provide free recycling services at the adjacent Mugga Lane Resource Management Centre; and
- (b) 45% of waste is organic, material that could be composted and reused as mulch and compost.

This means that the life of the Mugga Lane landfill could be greatly prolonged if 95% of waste was diverted to recycling or composting facilities.

Focus on the waste management principles of rethink, reduce, reuse, recycle. DPS will focus on finding composting facilities for Parliament House.