

The dirt on soil recycling



LBW Environment Projects

Most of us are familiar with the concept and benefits of recycling paper, plastic, glass and metal but fewer would know about recycling and re-using soil.

Waste soil from excavation at one site can provide a valuable resource for fill material at another site. This has driven a substantial amount of soil recycling activity in SA in recent years. If a soil recycling arrangement can be negotiated there are usually benefits to both the soil producer and receiver, including:

- Avoiding waste depot disposal fees
- Avoiding costs of importing quarry-sourced fill
- Reduced transport costs for disposal/importing activities
- Opportunity to share transport costs between sites

Broader benefits to society and environment come from saving valuable landfill space for municipal waste and cutting transport emissions if the receiving site is closer than the waste depot.

We've all seen "Clean Fill Wanted" signs prominently displayed on vacant lots, but moving soil isn't as simple as loading dirt in a truck and dumping it somewhere else.

A successful soil recycling transaction has to overcome several challenges, including managing potential environmental liability at the source and receiving sites. Insufficient pre-planning for soil management in construction programs; time and cost of environmental assessment; soil contamination and the absence of an immediate market for the soil are also potential limiters to a successful transaction.

Soil transport and disposal is regulated by the Environment Protection Act 1993. One avenue for potential liability under the Act, to the waste producer or receiver, is soil contamination. Some forms of soil contamination show obvious physical evidence (e.g. odour, staining) and provide a prompt for caution, but many common soil contaminants are invisible and identifiable only by laboratory testing. Without appropriate environmental due diligence, contaminated soils may be transported and reused, leaving the producer and receiver open to charges of unlawful conduct. In 2008 a civil contractor was prosecuted and convicted of importing contaminated soils to a residential development site in metropolitan Adelaide.

SA consulting company LBW Environment helps clients plan for successful soil recycling outcomes by assessing waste soils before proposed soil transport, identifying the waste category of the soil and negotiating with potential receiving sites to gain transport approval.

"Our experience with soil recycling work allows us to present timely advice to our clients," MD, Jarrod Bishop says.

"The flexibility to choose the right option at the right time avoids delays, saves money and controls the client's risk."



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