

THE VRECYCLE STORY



Ver: Jan 17

This handout explains why we do what we do and how we do it all. We welcome you to be part of what we've achieved.

How it began...

My childhood was spent mostly outdoors in the village of Cuncolim in Goa, India. With no television or video games, we were in touch with nature almost all day. When my family moved to the town of Margao, it was my responsibility to get rid of the day's generated garbage into the nearby bin. So when we moved to the village of Benaulim, I looked for the spot around my home where I should be disposing my garbage. Benaulim like most villages in Goa had no bins. This meant that most people burnt their waste or simply threw it into a nearby river or field. I could not do that, so I began to look for alternatives.

Learning from the experts

While in school, I talked to waste pickers and street recyclers and learnt about what they accepted. It was quite an easy task once I knew what they took. I also earned some pocket money from the recyclables I sold them. Then later, in 1999, I attended a composting workshop organized by the Goa Foundation. I immediately started composting and within three months was convinced that I was onto something. Even more encouraging was that the daily bag of waste that had to be thrown away now took a week to fill up. Over the years, I learnt of even more disposal systems for the hard to recycle waste. 18 years later, I can proudly say that I no longer generate any waste that I must throw away.

The Swedish connection

In 2000, I met some young Swedish students working on environmental awareness in Benaulim. It did not take too long for us to become friends and in 2003, I was invited to Sweden to learn how waste was managed there. I had a fantastic time there. Besides taking in the beauty and friendliness of the country, I also visited several waste management sites. When I returned, little did I know that I would be making another seven more visits over the next six years! In all my visits, I took back a little more information on Swedish waste practices. When I got back to Goa, I used this info to create a hybrid model that looks more like the Swedish system but runs with Goan systems.

Learnings, Collaboration & Sharing

The most important aspect of waste management is separating waste at source. This is the main problem of the Goan waste: It's always mixed. There is very little that you can do with mixed waste. To encourage people to separate, I collaborated with a friend Patricia Pinto who taught me an easy and low cost way to compost food waste. I designed signage that was easy to read and made recycling bins look attractive enough to put them right next to your home entrance. Through the entire journey, I shared my findings as well as my designs. All my creations continue to be copylefted (as in free for sharing in non-commercial situations).



The second most important learning was that people need to be educated on proper waste disposal techniques. I spend a lot of time in the year talking to people about their waste. I find that students and villages are most receptive compared to others.

The third learning was that not everybody has the time or interest to manage their own waste, and so in 2009, I started a service company called vRecycle to meet this need.

About vRecycle

vRecycle is a tiny firm that helps over 10,000 homes manage their waste in Goa. While it is mandatory that all clients separate their waste into wet & dry (Organic & Recyclable), we do the rest in a cost effective as well as environment friendly manner. We offer custom made solutions to fit every budget and space. In the last 8 years, we've setup over 2000 composters and over 150 community recycling points.



When a client calls us, we give them a price quote. After the initial composting and recycling bins are installed, we usually service the client or train their staff to do so. Composters produce compost that is used by the clients in their gardens. If compost is not needed, we pick it up and process it at our warehouse backyard. When the recycling bins are full, our van

 picks up the sorted recyclables and delivers them to one of our sorting warehouses. (We have one in Corlim, north Goa, and one in Nessai, South Goa). Here our staff further separate the recyclables into as much as 40 separate categories before it is sent to recyclers. About 18% of the total received waste is non-recyclable. With the assistance of the state government, we bale this and send this out of the state for co-processing in cement kilns for energy recovery. About 2% of the waste comprising of ceramics, tube lights and sanitary waste (diapers and san pads) is what we are finally left with. We store this until the Government has disposal systems for it.

A photograph of a man standing next to a large, high堆 of sorted recyclables. The recyclables are piled in various bags and containers, including blue and green ones. The man is wearing a yellow shirt and grey pants, and is looking towards the camera.

What makes us different

We often get mistake for waste disposal contractors, which of course we are not. vRecycle started out as an experiment to test if it was possible to run a successful waste management business even if:

- We share all our learnings with everybody. We believe we need to improve together.
- We focused on waste reduction by recycling rather than recycling only high value recyclables.
- Diverted all waste from burning or landfill even if storage of hard to dispose waste is expensive.
- We complied with government regulations, paid the required fees and taxes on sale of recyclables.
- We often have little or no support from the Government in what we do.
- Provide our staff facilities, safety equipment, health checks, bank accounts and more.
- Paid our unskilled staff (both men and women) equal and fair wages.

Our experiment was a success! However rather than keep growing, we would prefer to clone our operations in a decentralized hub and spoke model by partnering with young entrepreneurs using franchising as a tool. If you think you would like to venture into the exciting and fulfilling waste management business, please give us a call.