

## **WASTE AND WELLNESS**

Sharon Scott, National Corporate Services and HR Manager, Waste Management

Phone: 09 574 0858 Mobile: 027 207 8261 Email: sscott@wastemanagement.co.nz

### **Introduction**

What is the link between Waste and Wellness? The theme for this year's Wasteminz's Conference is "Too Good to Waste". A great theme with aspirational goals. But as we know from all those Air New Zealand safety videos – we need to look after ourselves first by putting on our own oxygen mask before being able to help others. I believe the same analogy applies to looking after our own health as part of looking after the health of the environment. Hospitality NZ head Vicki Lee wrote in an article in the New Zealand Herald on 2 September 2016 "It's hard to be a good leader if you aren't looking after your own wellbeing".

So as a leader in the industry Waste Management NZ has implemented a wellness program as part of supporting the health and wellbeing of its employees and ultimately contributing to the health of New Zealand. This paper talks about how and why we have implemented a wellness program and hopefully inspires others in the waste industry to do likewise.

### **Who are Waste Management?**

Waste Management is New Zealand's leading resource recovery, recycling and waste management provider. We pride ourselves on being a modern, progressive and professional operator driven by the core values of safety, sustainability and customer service.

We understand that our most valuable asset is our people and we are committed to their safety and wellbeing. Our employees work across a number of different areas including recycling and resource recovery, waste to energy initiatives, solid waste management, liquid and hazardous waste collection, treatment and disposal and the design and operation of many state-of-the-art waste management and recycling facilities nationwide. We have over 70 sites across New Zealand and these range from leading edge landfill and resource recovery parks, material recovery facilities, transfer stations and liquid, hazardous and medical waste processing facilities.

We have a workforce of over 1300 employees with an average age of 47. Our workforce is predominantly male (73%). Drivers are our largest job category – accounting for 30% of our workforce.

### **Why implement a Wellness Program?**

Waste Management has put a lot of work into its safety program and will always have a strong focus and commitment to safety. As our TRIFR continues to decline the question becomes what next. How do we reduce this even further?

As we all know the safety journey is a journey that never ends and is something we always need to be vigilant about. We all know intuitively that there is a link between health and safety. If I am tired, if I am overweight, if I don't eat well, if I have high blood pressure, if I am feeling stressed about a personal situation, if I am drinking too much, etc. etc. etc. – one or more of these factors are going to make me more at risk of having an accident.

An ACC morbidity research paper entitled "Results of Three Pilot Studies Quantifying the Effects of Selected Health Co-morbidities on ACC Injury Treatment Utilisation and Costs" published in December 2010 shows that the presence of diabetes and/or coronary heart disease (CHD) leads to more expensive injury claim. In short, if you have diabetes and/or

coronary heart disease you are more likely to make an injury claim, the cost of the claim is likely to be greater, and the length of the claim increases. For someone with diabetes the cost of an injury is on average 16% more than someone without diabetes and for some with CHD, the cost is 23% more than someone without. Put simply, improving the health of your workforce, and reducing the chances of diabetes or CHD, will lead to less injury costs. In a 12 month period extra ACC injury and rehabilitation costs of approximately \$100 million were associated with the presence of diabetes and coronary heart disease. So this is not just about safety and wellness but has financial implications for Government, industry and New Zealand.

In addition to supporting the health and safety of our workforce our second reason was to be an employer of choice. The waste sector is not an industry that people necessarily think about joining. When you tell people you work in the waste sector they don't automatically think of a great employer – they tend to think of old style landfills, rubbish bins, dirty work environments. We have a goal to not only be healthy and safe but also to be an employer of choice. And so implementing a wellness program was also a way for us to show our employees that we care about them and their wellbeing and that they are more than just a number. We truly want them to come to work fit and healthy and leave in the same way and we want their families to know we care about their wellbeing.

We often see Wellbeing as being the fluffy stuff. In a paper from the New Economics Foundation (NEF, 2015) entitled "Getting a Grip on the Fluffy Stuff – The Hard Science on Workplace Wellbeing" concluded that "The evidence shows that people who achieve good well-being at work are likely to be more creative, more loyal, more productive and provide better customer satisfaction than individuals with poor well-being at work". The paper goes on to say: "A comprehensive health and wellbeing program can empower employees by providing them with the knowledge and tools to improve their wellness. This will ultimately result in:

- An excited and united workforce;
- Improved engagement;

- Fewer injuries;
- Increased morale as employees feel valued and appreciated;
- Decreased absenteeism; and
- Increased productivity.”

So why are Waste Management investing in a wellness program? Two reasons:

- to support the health and safety of our workforce and their families;  
and
- to contribute to our initiatives on being an employer of choice.

### **What does our Wellness Program look like?**

We partnered with Vitality Works who provide wellness programs to a number of large New Zealand companies including Air New Zealand, KiwiRail, Fonterra, Winstone Aggregates, ACC and Department of Corrections. Based on their experience implementing Wellness Programs for other New Zealand companies we developed a plan.

We launched the program in January with the introduction of our Wellness portal on our intranet page and also our 2016 calendar. Each month we focus on a different topic and our portal is updated to include information on all the latest events and activities happening around the business, as well as many valuable resources and articles on all aspects of health and wellbeing. It covers exercise, nutrition, managing your finances, learning how to sleep better, building resilience.

Videos, infographics, training programs, recipes and articles of interest are used to convey these key messages. For added engagement regular competitions with great prizes, personal challenges to try and regular live Web Talks with well-known personalities have been introduced.

Within the portal is also an Ask an Expert section, where staff can ask one of the Vitality Works experts (including a doctor, nutritionist, psychologist and exercise physiologist) any question relating to health and wellbeing, and receive a personal, 100% confidential reply directly from them. Staff can access the portal from home and for those staff who don't have access to the intranet Managers print out relevant material. Vitality Works provide us with reports each quarter that detailing the number of views and what information is of most relevance to our staff. Views each quarter average 2,000 which for a workforce of 1300 means the majority of our workforce at some point are looking at the information.

The most successful activity to date has been our Fit24 Challenge. The promotional material used to market this said:

Do you ever wish you had super powers? Would you settle for more energy, better focus, a leaner physique and better sleep quality? If the answer is yes, stay tuned for the Fit24™ March team challenge – your chance to sleep better, have more energy, become fitter and win some great prizes while competing with your colleagues.

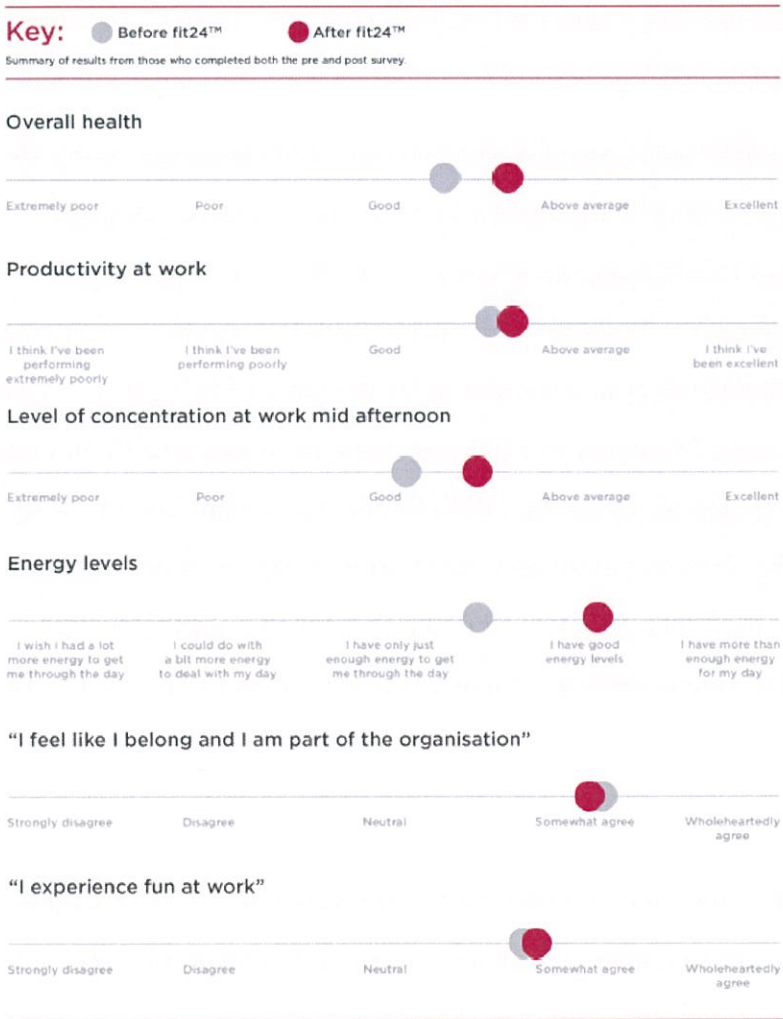
The marketing worked. We had 260 employees take part in our Fit24 challenge during the month of March. Staff made up teams of between 5 and 7 members. Overall 43 teams participated. We even had Executive Management Teams, so staff could compare their performance against company leaders. The leader board was updated regularly and there was lots of friendly rivalry and banter as teams competed for the glory of first place. 41% achieved 100% which meant having 24 days with > 7 hours sleep, no sugar, and 20 minutes or more of exercise. 63% of participants lost weight with an average weight loss of 2.4 kg and a total weight loss of 315 kg. In terms of ongoing behaviour change 64% will continue to reduce or eliminate sugar from their diet, 80% will continue to prioritise getting enough sleep and 82% will continue to prioritise getting a minimum of 20 minutes of physical activity per day.

Whilst we had initially planned on one team winner. This changed when four teams achieved 100% - a great achievement for our first year of such an activity. Winning teams received \$400 each to celebrate with an activity that reflected the spirit of Fit24.

We also asked for nominations for Spirit of the Challenge to recognise an individual who had embraced the spirit of Fit24. The nominations were quite inspiring. We award three individuals for their contribution. One of the winning nominations read:

**Kevin Holdsworth** from Whangarei – Kevin was nominated by Julie Palmer. Kevin is an FEL driver who starts at 4 am each morning. With early starts and driving it was not always easy to establish a routine of good food and exercise. However thanks to Fit24 Kevin began reading the food labels and was shocked by the amount of sugar in many products. Kevin also started to increase his exercise by walking the long way around the block to pick up his grandchildren from school. He tells us he can now sprint with his grandchildren. Kevin intends to continue with the great work he has achieved through the challenge.

Other outcomes from the challenge included:



Fit 24 was most definitely a success at both an organisational, team and individual level and is something we will do again in 2017.

As a Company we have historically provided staff with the opportunity to do annual health checks. This year as part of our Wellness Program we put a lot more information around this to encourage a greater level of participation. We had 596 people participate. 73% were male and the average age was 48 – so fairly reflective of our workforce. The results of an average Waste Management employee were:

- 48 years of age
- Blood pressure normal
- Good cholesterol and glucose levels
- BMI of 30.1kgm – so classified as overweight
- Low risk of cardiovascular disease in next 5 years
- Heart age 6.1 years older than actual age
- Higher risk of developing Type 2 Diabetes in next 5 years.

The lifestyle habits of our employees:

- 25% are current smokers (62% of these people are considering quitting though)
- 21% get enough physical activity, but 34% don't move nearly enough – including 16% who are sedentary (less than 30 mins of movement each week)
- 15% have good nutritional habits, but 25% have poor habits. In particular 48% of people eat less than 3 servings of vegetables each day.

We will use this information to help formulate our Wellbeing Calendar for 2017. Areas of focus will be nutrition, exercise, smoking cessation. Each year we will compare the data and hope to see a significant improvement in employee health.

## **Conclusion:**

Whilst it is early days, we do believe that implementation of a Wellness Program can only have positive results. We are hearing many discussions around health, exercise, nutrition, sleep – discussions you might not have heard a year ago. People are more aware of the importance of looking after their wellbeing.

There is also a feeling that the Company is doing more than just talking about health and safety - we are actually investing in employee wellbeing.

Additionally through programs like the Fit 24 Challenge there has been an increased level of morale within teams.

We will now build our plan for 2017 based on the results of this year's program and we look forward to building a healthier workforce as we believe the health of our employees is "too good to waste".

## **References:**

New Economics Foundation. (2015). *Getting a Grip on the Fluffy Stuff – The Hard Science on Workplace Wellbeing*.

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