

IMPLEMENTING THE 6 RS

Chuck Nall explores the visualisation for an effective conservation strategy

In the United States the Environmental Protection Agency reports that many landfills are closed simply because they are full or they are contaminating ground water. As much as 70% deposits to these landfills could be recycled. Well over 90% of the world's screen-printing shops are small businesses with 50 or fewer employees, with most operated by active owners. Implementing an effective and practical conservation program for a screen-printing business starts with a visualisation of this strategy. Visualisation helps remind all employees of each business's commitment to conservation and corporate responsibility.

There are many versions of the 6 Rs. Generally they follow these principles:

- **Rethink:** Do you really need this product? Can a better process or product be implemented?
- **Refuse:** Avoiding purchase of environmentally burdensome materials whenever possible, as products with over-packaging.
- **Reduce:** Reduce waste material, by

analysing process and proper yield.

- **Re-use:** Re-use waste material without processing, as containers from one area that can be used in another area of the business.
- **Reform:** Re-use materials in a different form
- **Recycle:** Materials are sent to centres for regeneration.

Over the last 20 years this list has changed from four to five to six principles. For employees to 'buy' into your corporate vision they must understand each principle as it makes sense to their job. While someone in purchasing can understand their purchasing function, they must understand the implementation and use of the item to make the best conservation decision in their purchasing. Again purchasing is faced with not just a low cost provider decision. Communication of the corporate vision has to be decimated and understood by all employees.

It is best to think of these principles as a timeline from rethink through recycle. Each employee should be encouraged to look at

each process they are involved and how it affects the 6 R's timeline. Management should empower and encourage input of the principles to create unique 'best practices' for each individual business.

Sounds simple, right? Management will need to communicate these principles clearly to all in the business. Then ask managers to solicit observations from all employees. Simple right? Actually – too simple. At some point all owners, managers and supervisors realise that experienced employees will know the details and execution of every task. These are the people actually doing these tasks each day. Now the really simple part. Ready? Ask employees how they would implement these principles best. Ask how they would improve their daily processes. It should come as no surprise that not only will employees 'buy into' this programme, you will see things you would never see without the vision and input of your experienced employees.

The pay-off for ownership is the inverse relationship these principles have to cost savings. Avoidance of products is the easiest and least expensive form of conservation and is best done at the top of the strategy in the ReThink and ReFuse phases. The Reduce, ReUse and ReForm phases of the strategy address recycling decisions, recovery of energy and treatment of materials. The final and most costly decisions address containment and proper disposal. The inverse relationship is that the least costly items are made and the beginning of the 6 Rs as they reduce the amount and number of costlier items made at the bottom of the 6 Rs.

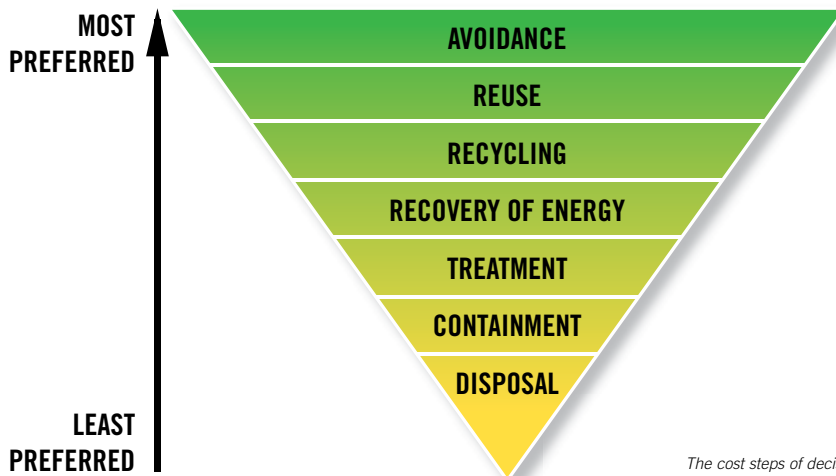
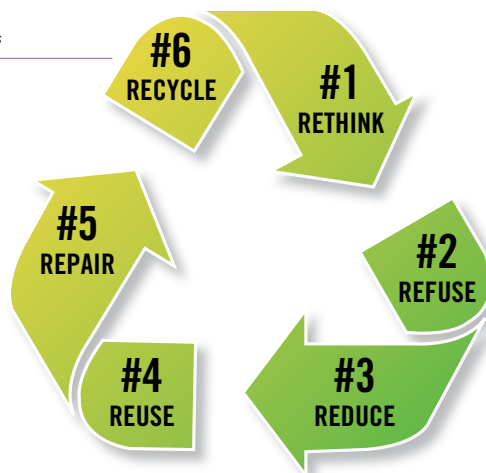
We have known and heard of the 6 Rs for years, but they are merely a 'catch-phrase' for most businesses. School age children are taught these, too. The visualisation strategy takes the form of posters throughout all departments as reinforcement to all employees. It serves as a reminder to all employees that they are on the front line of a conservation company. Encourage communication of ideas by employees. Using simple visuals posted throughout your departments bring a continual invitation of employees to participate in the conservation success of your company. Are the 6 Rs part of your daily business practices? ■

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The conservation steps of the 6 Rs



The cost steps of decisions