

A plastic pellet spill on a New Zealand street. Photo: Ian Shepherd

We're aiming for zero plastic pellet loss

By David Aitken, CEO of National Road Carriers Association

PLASTIC WASTE THAT ENDS UP IN THE ocean kills marine animals when they ingest it – and we want to ensure the trucking industry is not part of the problem.

We want to do our bit to make sure there is no plastic pollution from trucks – and we're taking steps to educate National Road Carriers Association members on how to do that.

When seabirds, turtles and fish ingest plastics in the ocean they get sick, malnourished and often die. These plastics may be used consumer products (eg bottles, caps, containers, etc).

A less visible, but just as damaging, problem is resin pellets (sometimes called nurdles) that wash into inland waterways and stormwater systems and end up in the sea.

While consumers are responsible for the proper disposal of the products they use, we in the transport industry must focus on containment of the products we move, handle and store – especially plastic pellets, the basic raw material of the plastics industry.

Every plastics manufacturer and distributor must prevent the pellets from getting into waterways that eventually lead to the sea.

As part of our environmental and sustainability project, NRC is planning to team up with Plastics New Zealand and the Healthy Waters team at Auckland Council to bring more awareness of plastics in our environment – and the part the trucking industry can play to get this under control.

Plastics NZ runs a programme called *Operation Clean Sweep* that helps manufacturing sites meet best practice for plastic pellet handling, to prevent accidental release into the environment.

The freight industry is involved in unloading, storing and distributing plastic pellets. Handling this material carries a risk of spillage and our members need to know how to prevent spills or handle them when they occur.

Our proposed collaboration with Plastics NZ and Healthy Waters will include events, seminars and workshops to help NRC members understand the importance of safe storage, handling and transportation of all types of plastics – from raw material to processed plastics.

We are looking at a pilot programme to test the best way to engage with the freight industry. NRC will promote the pilot to up to 10 members in one area. The members will be audited against minimum performance requirements for:

- Stormwater drain protection in all risk areas
- Standard operating procedure for cleanup of plastic spills
- Appropriate equipment available for plastic spill cleanups
- Staff awareness of spill risks

A report, with recommendations for changes, will be written – based on the audit. If not already in place, a site spill plan will be

developed in collaboration with the business and spill training will be provided. Once best practice has been achieved an *Operation Clean Sweep* certificate will be issued.

The first step in our zero plastic pellet loss project has been to produce the *NRC Guide to Plastic Handling* https://www.natroad.co.nz/about_nrc/Category?Action=View&Category_id=500 which gives step by step instructions for different types of transport companies and their staff on how to properly handle and dispose of plastic pellets.

The *NRC Guide to Plastic Handling* starts with five basic steps for managers:

1. Commit to making zero pellet loss a priority
2. Assess your company's situation and needs
3. Make needed upgrades in facilities and equipment as appropriate
4. Raise employee awareness and accountability
5. Follow up and enforce procedures. When management cares, employees will too

The guide provides specific advice for curtainsider trucks and bulk container transportation, what to do if a spill occurs while loading or unloading and a list of dos and don'ts.

Plastic pellet containment is good for the environment and good for business. We hope you will support this important initiative. With your help and cooperation, we can achieve our goal of zero pellet loss. 