

Story: Ian Bushnell

waste embraced

In an industry with limited resources, Ernest Dupere is fostering better results for builders, clients and the environment.

Ernest Dupere doesn't have a problem with waste. He can't get enough of it. Better it go to him and the company he co-directs with his business partner Dana Dupere, than end up in landfill or worse, dumped illegally.

Benedict Industries is the second biggest recycler in the Sydney area but its point of difference is what it does with the waste it collects.

Established in 1966 as a family-owned haulage company, Benedict soon expanded into quarrying, building and landscape supplies, recycling and now property development. The company has been at the forefront of the emerging circular economy, creating products from waste that have become industry standards and has been a supplier to some major projects in Sydney.

'Our company in many ways has led the way for the provision of recycled and quarry landscape products to the construction industry in Sydney,' says Mr Dupere, who has been with the company since 1986.

In a world of shrinking resources, cost imperatives and shifts in public expectations about the environment, the building industry has seen a steady growth in the recycling of waste and the take-up of recycled products.

The trend is clear. According to the Australian National Waste Report 2016 prepared for the Department of Environment and Energy and released last year, about 20 mega tonnes of

construction and demolition waste was generated in 2014-15 and 64 per cent was recovered.

Of this about 17.2 mega tonnes was masonry waste including concrete, bricks and rubble, with 70 per cent recycled. From 2006-07 to 2014-15 masonry waste generation increased from about 15 to 17 Mt but the quantity that went to landfill dropped from about 5.6 to 5.2 Mt while recycling grew strongly from 8.9 to 12 Mt.

Mr Dupere says builders have always appreciated the cost-savings that proper waste management and recycling can provide, as well as meeting the increasing demands from customers for greener houses.

'If you can suddenly save \$100 a month on your power bill that [is something that] affects people's decisions, so the bottom line encourages them to build more efficient structures. The costs of delivering those are [improved if you're] more efficient with the waste generated in construction and clearing the site,' he says.

This has driven demand for Benedict's ever-increasing range of recycled landscape and building supply products that are competitive with quarried ones, including soils, mulches, aggregates, gravel and roadbase.

And with the cost of landfill so high in Sydney, not to mention the environmental consequences of simply dumping waste, there are savings all round if that waste can be diverted to recycling.





Benedict Industries is the second biggest recycler in the Sydney area

Mindful of conserving its finite quarry resources, Benedict is driven by how it can supply a recycled product rather than a quarried one.

'When quarries close, stuff comes from further and further away which, environmentally, is not a good result. You start wearing the roads out with trucks. That's what's happened to Sydney,' he says.

'We need to replace quarried products because our next quarry is going to be 400 kilometres away and I don't like the thought of that.'

Mr Dupere believes Benedict's dual role as a quarry owner and recycler has given it the edge in product development.

'We're fortunate because our DNA is as a quarrying business so we understand how to make products, and because we're also heavily involved in the recycling business we can apply those disciplines,' he says.

He says Benedict can engineer products from waste when others cannot and the company plans to open four more recycling facilities in the next two years.

'I always believe you can engineer an equivalent solution,' Mr Dupere says.

There are savings all round if that waste can be diverted to recycling

The key is listening to builders and anticipating their needs, supplying products they want to use that are very cost-competitive with virgin quarry product.

Mr Dupere says site drainage products, structural soils, soil blends and gravel are all sourced from recycled materials and builders are going to see increased percentages of recycled content in their aggregates, as well as glass in concrete sands, which at present do not include any recycled material.

Benedict is looking to re-enter the glass sand market and introduce a range of concrete and asphalt sands, with a percentage of post-consumer glass crushed into it.

But Mr Dupere says a more supportive regulatory environment is needed to expand the use of recycled materials, including adjusting product specifications where there is equivalent performance and even mandating a certain percentage in government work.

'As long as it performs the same why can't we use it? It's better for the environment, it's better all the way round,' Mr Dupere says.

Now a property developer as well, Mr Dupere says the challenge for the building industry is delivering affordable dwellings because not everybody wants to live in an apartment.

'It doesn't have to be big patch of dirt but it needs to be a patch of dirt that's theirs,' he says.

Mr Dupere suggests the answer is to take terrace living to the suburbs but the government needs to knock down planning hurdles and allow 120-square metre blocks.

'Everybody's idea of higher density is high-rise but it's not. You can have nice two- to three-storey terraces like they have in the inner city of Sydney and Melbourne – they would be wildly popular and the efficiencies of construction are there,' he says.

'That's how the building industry can supply adequate housing at an affordable price.'

Benedict has partnered with Mirvac in two major projects, at Moorebank near Liverpool and Menangle, south-west of Sydney.

Its decommissioned Moorebank quarry is to be transformed into a marina with 350 apartments, 35 terraces, 180 houses, and a shopping centre with another 180 apartment and offices.

The Menangle Creamery site south-west of Sydney is to be redeveloped into a major new destination with a train station, new town centre, restored heritage buildings, brewery, distillery, restaurants, hotel and a concert amphitheatre for 20,000 people.

'We want to create something special,' Mr Dupere says.

'That's what drives me, I'm not driven by money these days – I'm driven by solving problems and creating good outcomes.'

www.benedict.com.au



Ernest Dupere of Benedict Industries

'WE'RE FORTUNATE BECAUSE OUR DNA IS AS A QUARRYING BUSINESS SO WE UNDERSTAND HOW TO MAKE PRODUCTS'