

Circular Energy, circular economy

IT'S no longer the responsibility of the customer to ensure that products are diverted from landfill sites, but the responsibility of the producer! Enter, Circular Energy, a newly-formed producer responsibility organisation (PRO) that's committed to facilitating waste disposal regulation targets through industry best practices and international standards.

For the past 50 years, the production and supply of goods globally has transformed and expanded rapidly. Consumers today have more choice than ever before. Food and goods packaging technology have also evolved significantly and opened new distribution channels. The advantage of this innovation is less food waste as goods can be stored and protected for extended periods, and also be transported over long distances, resulting in reduced costs and carbon emissions and the safe and hygienic delivery of products.

However, this increase in consumerism and convenience lifestyles have led to many environmental challenges. Irresponsible disposal, lack of widespread awareness and the production of badly designed packaging has led to the rise in waste and litter in the environment, as well as the rapid loss of landfill space locally and abroad. To manage this problem, governments all over the world have introduced Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) regulations. Mandatory EPR came into effect locally in November 2021 under Section 18 of the National Environmental Management Waste Act.

These regulations hold producers – which include manufacturers, importers and brand owners – responsible for the complete lifecycle of the products they sell. This obligates producers to take responsibility for where their products and packaging ultimately end up at end of life by requiring them to join a PRO or manage their own EPR scheme that facilitates this process.

Circular Energy, a registered not-for-profit PRO that was formed in October 2021, operates a nationwide take-back system for the collection, recycling and environmentally sound processing of waste electrical and electronic equipment (WEEE), lighting equipment, batteries and packaging. As a PRO, Circular Energy is registered with the Department of Fisheries, Forestry and the Environment (DFFE).

According to Circular Energy's environmental manager Charl Klynsmith, the core objectives of this PRO include operating a compliant scheme according to strict governance principals. He says the team is dedicated to positioning Circular Energy as a leading PRO in South Africa's waste management sector. 'We are committed to not only promoting and putting into practice circular economy principals, but contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals to effect change with meaningful impact and protect the environment with an inclusive and holistic best practice approach.'



The Circular Energy team consists of Joanne Dean (non-executive director), Charl Klynsmith (environmental manager), Mpendulo Ginindza (non-executive director), Amanda Dlamini (administration and compliance) and Patricia Schröder (executive spokesperson). Not pictured is Monique Rodel, who is responsible for governance and communications.

Since its founding in 2021, Circular Energy has managed to accumulate a large base of producer members (approximately 20), which include well-known businesses in South Africa's electrical, electronic, lighting and packaging space such as Grabtree, Ellies Electronics, LG Electronics SA, Mr Price Group and Woolworths. 'Our producer members list also includes Siemens and Rubicon, the company responsible for importing Tesla products to South Africa. Scuderia Ferrari is an automotive producer member,' comments Charl.

Executive manager Patricia Schröder explains that while the majority of producer members are predominantly from the electronics and lighting sectors, the interest in packaging recycling is also growing steadily. 'We're not a packaging PRO in the traditional sense,' Patricia explains. 'We are focused mainly on our members' product packaging that's imported and sold in South Africa, which is mostly comprised of cardboard, plastics and polystyrene, as well as paper, in the form of instruction booklets.'

These businesses would typically have up to three different types of packaging in their products. So instead of the administrative burden of joining several PROs, Circular Energy's main anchor members requested that WEEE PROs are registered for packaging all well. 'This allows us to be a one-stop-shop for their products and packaging, and of course, their recycling needs,' she states.