

Beyond Recycling

what YOU can do...

Although Australians are concerned about the environment and committed to recycling, we are still creating more waste per person than almost any other country. The good news is almost all of the waste we generate can be avoided in the first place, reused or recycled. There are numerous steps the community, government and industry can take to help solve the problem.

Why is there a waste problem?

As a society, we produce and use goods much faster than the environment and our society can manage them at the end of their life. The problem extends beyond the cost and impact of landfilling used goods, it goes right up the production chain to the impact of the extraction and processing of non-renewable materials to make consumer goods. A significant amount of energy, water and transport is also required to produce these goods. Each person in NSW alone generates more than a tonne of waste every year! That waste goes straight to landfill unless we choose to re-use, recycle or compost it - or better still, not create the waste in the first place



Nearly 5 billion used beverage containers are disposed of to landfill or litter each year in Australia.

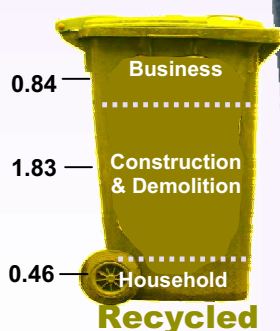
What is the situation in Australia?

Australia has the second highest rate of waste generation per person in the world. This is despite the community's significant efforts and interest in household recycling. While communities in many parts of Europe share a similar high level of concern for the environment and interest in recycling, their superior reuse and recycling rates and low levels of waste generation are possible because their governments and industry are heavily committed to minimising waste.

In Australia, the focus of our efforts has historically been on the kerbside collection of household recycling for paper and some plastic, glass and metal containers.

There is a growing awareness that these systems are **NOT** the most cost-effective way to manage our entire waste problem because:

What did we send to landfill and what did we recycle in 2000...?



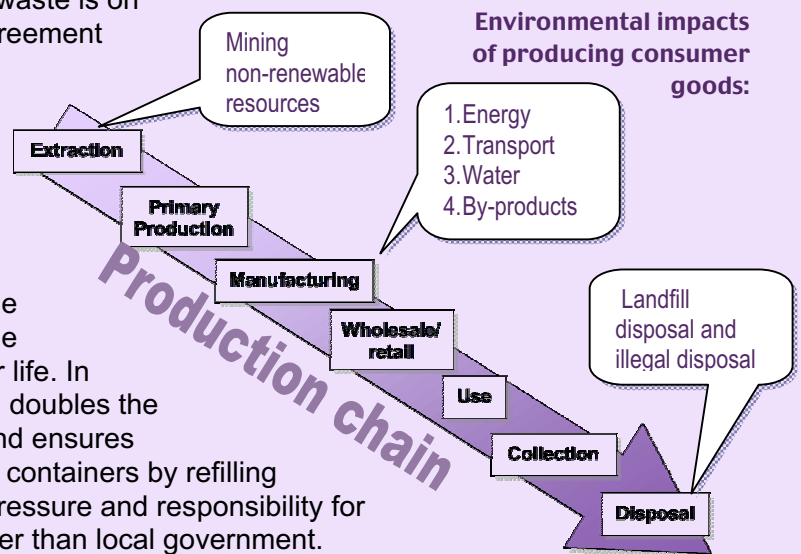
- ✓ **Kerbside recycling is expensive.** You the household ratepayer and your council together bear the huge cost of providing the service. There is a huge gap between what it costs to run kerbside collection services and the returns from selling the collected materials. In fact, you pay about \$50/year to council as part of the annual waste charge towards the net cost of providing kerbside collection services.
- ✓ **The entire waste stream is not addressed.** There are many materials that are not currently collected at kerbside, that go straight to landfill. This includes almost all packaging and container materials consumed and disposed of away from home, food and some garden waste.
- ✓ **Contamination.** A significant proportion of what is collected for recycling at the kerbside is of poor quality or non-recyclable and sent to landfill.
- ✓ **Increasing waste generation.** We are creating waste faster than we are recycling it. Recycling alone does not help us reduce waste. Ideally we need to reduce the amount of materials that require recycling in the first place.

A clever person can solve a problem, but a wise person avoids one.

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Who is responsible for managing waste and resources?

Currently almost all the burden of managing waste is on councils and ratepayers. There is general agreement worldwide that it is time for producers to take greater responsibility for the products they make. In many European countries like Sweden and Germany, Government and Industry have developed policies to ensure producers are more responsible for the waste their products create further down the production chain. For example, throughout the European Union, automakers must pay for the reuse and recycling of cars at the end of their life. In South Australia, a deposit and refund system doubles the recovery rate of used beverage containers and ensures producers take responsibility for the returned containers by refilling or recycling of them. This system shifts the pressure and responsibility for this packaging waste towards producers rather than local government.



These waste policies exist within a framework of **Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR)** - "an environmental policy approach in which a producer's physical and/or financial responsibility for a product is extended to the post-consumer stage of a product's life cycle". EPR initiatives have been commonplace in European waste policy for decades. Australia is only now catching up to international best-practice developments. EPR initiatives should ideally be implemented by the Commonwealth Government, but could also be developed and certainly advocated by individual State governments.

What can YOU do beyond kerbside recycling?

As a citizen, a council ratepayer and a consumer of goods, you can play a significant role in waste minimisation and supporting the implementation of Extended Producer Responsibility in NSW and Australia. The choice of products you buy at the shops has a huge impact on the amount and type waste generated. It also sends a message to industry that you prefer goods which help reduce waste. Many of the tips in the Community Checklist will save you money as well as reduce the environmental impact of waste.



Further resources:

NSW Department of Environment and Conservation - EPR: www.dec.nsw.gov.au/waste/epr/eprs04.htm
Local Government Association of NSW and Shires Association of NSW (LGSA): www.lgsa.org.au
Independent Review of Container Deposit Legislation: www.isf.uts.edu.au/CDL_Report/index.html
Friends of the Earth - Extended Producer Responsibility: www.sydney.foe.org.au/SustainableConsumption/epr
Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) - waste: <http://www.oecd.org>
WorldWatch Institute - Consumption: www.worldwatch.org/features/consumption/
INFORM - Community Waste Prevention Toolkit: www.informinc.org

Community Checklist

- ✓ Think before you buy – do you really need the product?
- ✓ Purchase products with less packaging and use your own refillable packaging whenever you can.
- ✓ Choose packaging that is more easily reused or recycled.
- ✓ Purchasing longer lasting products.
- ✓ Try services rather than goods (eg. renting, borrowing, or sharing rather than buying your own)
- ✓ Compost or worm-farm your food scraps and garden waste.
- ✓ Reuse or repair products rather than disposing and purchasing new ones.
- ✓ Participate in local, state or commonwealth decision-making through advocacy and voting.
- ✓ Support your local council's efforts to get producers to take more responsibility (financial and environmental) for the products they put on the market.



