



## FACT SHEET

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# Summary of social research on household kerbside service attitudes and behaviours in Victoria.

Sustainability Victoria commissioned social research in 2014 to determine community attitudes towards waste and resource recovery, and identify drivers and barriers, as well as the target audience, underlining contamination of recycling collections and resource recovery rates.

### Objectives

The objectives of this research were to:

- › identify and establish a baseline of community attitudes regarding the need for and importance of an integrated waste and resource recovery system
- › determine baseline figures for attitudes and key behaviours, and identify key drivers and barriers influencing contamination of recycling collections, low resource recovery rates for priority materials, contamination of organic collections, and participation in food waste collection.

Key behaviours investigated in relation to recycling were:

- › recycling of hard plastic
- › recycling of aluminium items
- › recycling of containers with food
- › recycling from the bathroom and laundry
- › keeping recyclables out of plastic bags.

Key behaviours investigated in relation to organics were:

- › recycling food waste (hypothetical behaviour)
- › keeping organics out of plastic bags
- › keeping backyard rubbish (plastic bags, beer bottles, toys, gardening debris etc.) out of the organics bin.

The research also aimed to test the community's understanding of the language currently used for waste education, and identify more appropriate alternatives where required. Lastly, the research aimed to identify target audiences for addressing recycling behaviour.

### Methodology

The research was conducted between 29 May and 7 July 2014. It involved:

- › sixteen two-hour in-depth interviews with adults of varying ages and backgrounds, living in metropolitan Melbourne
- › 456 15-minute online surveys with adults living in Victoria (metropolitan/regional) with access to a recycling bin and either a garden waste bin or a garden and food waste bin.

### Attitudes towards recycling and waste management

Importance of recycling and support for waste management systems:

- › The majority of Victorians agree that recycling is either very (53 per cent) or fairly (42 per cent) important.
- › Similarly, the majority (90 per cent) of Victorians support the need for a waste management system, including landfills and recycling plants, in areas where they are needed.
- › For most, in-home systems support recycling and make it just as easy to recycle as to put items in the rubbish bin (80 per cent) and are supported by all household members (88 per cent).
- › A theme that emerged from in-depth interviews was people's difficulty in articulating why they recycle, beyond that it is a habit. This suggests that for some, recycling is automatic, low-involvement behaviour.

### Knowledge about recycling

- › Most Victorians believe they have at least a fair knowledge of what can go in their recycling bins. Overall, 97 per cent think they know at least fairly well what can go in the recycling bin and 96 per cent think they know at least fairly well what can go in the organics bin for garden waste. However, when probed on specific items, not everyone is aware of what can and cannot be recycled.
- › Those aged 55 years and over are more likely to think they understand very well what items can be placed in the recycling bins, while those aged 18-34 are significantly less likely to think they understand very well what items go in these bins.
- › Local councils are key sources of information about what items can and cannot be recycled, including information provided by local councils (68 per cent), and council websites (32 per cent). Local newspapers are also important for 21 per cent. Fewer become aware through social media sites (3 per cent), community groups (4 per cent) and neighbours (4 per cent).

**Reported recycling behaviours**

- Most Victorians (80 per cent) state that they nearly always recycle even if it requires additional effort
- Six in 10 Victorians believe they recycle almost every item that can be recycled
- The majority of Victorians (76 per cent) do not always recycle hard plastic items (eg shampoo and detergent bottles, yoghurt containers, punnets and biscuit trays)
- One in seven Victorians always recycle aluminium items (e.g. drink cans, food tins, aerosol cans, baking trays, foil)
- Those who do not recycle aluminium items would be more likely to do so if they knew items do not have to be washed or rinsed before
- Just over one quarter (28 per cent) of Victorians recycle food containers (eg pizza boxes, cardboard takeaway containers, yogurt containers, margarine containers and plastic takeaway containers). The majority (72 per cent) do not consistently recycle all of these items
- There are slight variations in keeping plastic bags out of recycling bins, with most (87 per cent) correctly putting items loose into the recycling bin, and 88 per cent placing items loose in an organics bin for garden waste.
- Almost three quarters (73 per cent) of Victorians do not always recycle all recyclable items from the bathroom and laundry

**Drivers and barriers to recycling**

Environmental concerns (including doing the right thing by the environment and preserving resources for future generations) are the main motivation for one in five (22 per cent) Victorian adults to recycle. In home recycling systems (including having an in-home recycling system in the house) and information about recycling (either on packaging or elsewhere) were the main things making recycling easier for 17 per cent and 18 per cent respectively.

Barriers to recycling include:

- being unsure about what can and cannot be recycled (21 per cent)
- the chemicals in some household bottles preventing recycling of items (11 per cent)
- the recycling bin being full before collection day (11 per cent)
- not wanting to waste too much water to clean items (6 per cent)
- the time and effort required to wash items before putting them into the recycling bin (6 per cent).

18-34 year olds are more likely to mention being unsure about what can and cannot be recycled (42 per cent) and the time or effort to wash items before putting them into the recycling bin (26 per cent) as barriers to recycling, whereas those aged 55 years and older are much less likely to mention these as barriers to recycling.

**Organic (garden and food) recycling**

Nine out of 10 Victorians always put items in the organics bin loosely. The item most likely to have been incorrectly placed in the organics bin is soil, with 43 per cent having done so.

Among those with access to an organics bin, 60 per cent of people are likely to consider putting food waste in their organics bin if this service was available. These people indicated that being able to wrap food waste in paper rather than placing loose in the green bin and a free container provided by the council would make it easier to recycle food waste.

Half of respondents (52 per cent) are likely to consider a food waste recycling system such as a compost, worm farm or other system in their household, and a quarter (26 per cent) are unlikely to do so. Attracting vermin, and the smell of the organics bin are the main reasons that people say would make it difficult to recycle food waste.

A free container would motivate half of Victorians with an organics bin (52 per cent) to make it easier to recycle organic food waste, followed by compostable bags to store food waste in (41 per cent) and a lidded container for storage (33 per cent).

**Understanding recycling language**

The research tested the community’s understanding of the language currently used for waste education. There were a number of terms currently well understood, as well as a number of terms that cause confusion. It may be appropriate to avoid these terms in communications, or, if alternatives cannot be identified, provide further explanation and/or education.

Terms well understood	Terms less understood
Recycling bin	Organics
Compost	Co-mingled
Food waste	Residual waste
Green waste	Contamination
Garden waste	Biodegradable
	Hard plastic
	Soft plastic

**Target audience**

Those who do not always recycle the key materials investigated (hard plastics, aluminium, items from the bathroom and laundry, items loose rather than in plastic bags), are more likely to be:

- living in Melbourne
- younger – aged 18-34.

In addition, those who are not always recycling food containers are more likely to be:

- younger – aged 18-24
- living in group/share household.

Of the people who would consider recycling food waste in the organics bin, 58 per cent are female and 42 per cent are male.

## Recommendations from the research

- › People aged 18-34 are less informed about recycling practices than older Victorians. It will be important to build their awareness and understanding of what can and cannot be recycled to encourage the correct recycling behaviour
- › Encourage households to actively evaluate the system or process they have in place for recycling in their house
- › It is recommended that communications to householders avoid those terms that are not well understood.

## Recycling different materials

- › Remind and encourage people to recycle those items about which there is more uncertainty:
  - hard plastic items, and softer plastic items such as biscuit trays and punnets
  - aerosol cans and aluminium foil
  - food containers, especially plastic takeaway containers.
- › Remind Victorians that they do not need to rinse containers before recycling them.

## Recycling from all rooms in the house

- › Build an understanding of what items from the bathroom and laundry can be recycled. Focus on items such as aerosol cans from the bathrooms (e.g. deodorant) and plastic bottles for cleaning. Inform audiences that chemicals in cleaning products (e.g. bleach) do not cause an issue when items are recycled
- › Reduce barriers associated with bin sizes in homes being too small, and encourage a recycling bin in a location such as the laundry.

## Keeping items out of plastic bags

- › Target communications to audiences who are incorrectly disposing of recyclables in plastic bags. Educate people on why the correct behaviour is important, and the consequences of the incorrect behaviour (i.e. that recyclables in plastic bags do not get recycled, and end up in landfill).

## Food waste recycling

- › Educate householders on the benefits of recycling food waste
- › Communications should be aimed at those primarily responsible for food preparation in the home
- › For those municipalities that provide a food waste collection service, offering households plastic containers to store food waste inside the house may encourage more people to recycle food waste.