



RECYCLING 101 WEBINAR – FAQ

Given the great interest we received from our Recycling 101 Webinar as part of National Recycling Week, we put together this handy FAQ for the questions we didn't get to during the event. You can watch a recorded version of this webinar here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vyqePjh-TGU>

Can we put napkins in our compost bin?

You can, provided they are only made from paper (some wipes which have plastic are often mistaken for napkins which cannot be composted). Make sure there are no dairy or meat residue in the napkins as they can create maggots in our worm farm or compost (ew!). You can however place any sort of dairy and meat residue in your FOGO or Bokashi bin.

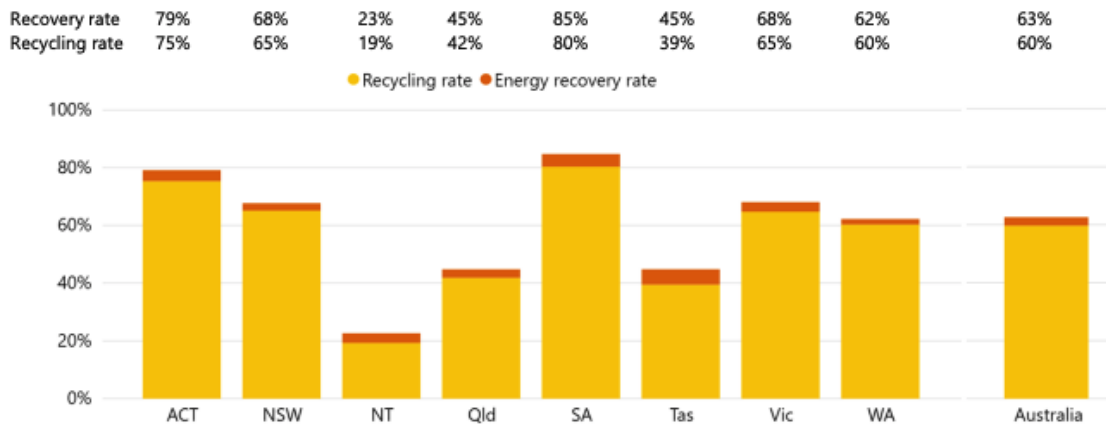
Can cling wrap be recycled by REDcycle?

Only a couple of brands are currently accepted, you can check them out [here](#). Cling wrap needs to be rinsed and dry (which can be tricky due to the way of how cling wrap is used). Since it is quite tricky, we recommend avoid using cling wrap and look at options such as beeswax wraps, reusable silicone lids/bags, reusable containers etc...

If NSW households are only recycling around 40-45% of waste generated (not sure about other states), how are we recycling around 60% of all waste in Australia? Is it primarily because of C&D recycling?

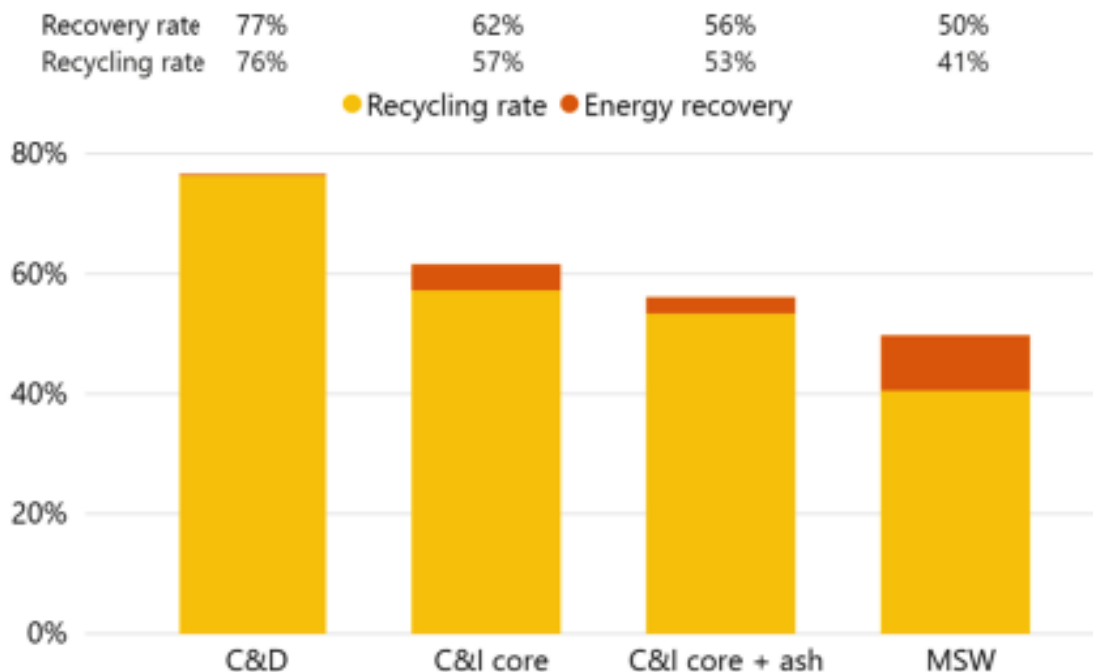
These figures are taken into account ALL types of waste, they are cumulative and take into account all waste generated as a nation and can be broken down by state, the figure below from the National Waste report shows those figures (figure 4, below). You can read the report [here](#).

Figure 4 Resource recovery and recycling rates by jurisdiction, 2018-19



Is the 60% figure the amount that goes to MRFs (Material Recovery Facility) or is it the amount that is recycled minus contamination?

No, as mentioned above, that accounts for everything that is recycled, coming from the different waste streams, part of that is what goes through the MRFs from the waste collected from households, but there are other waste streams that are not necessarily going through a MRF as they are separated from the source. These waste streams can come from businesses and the construction and demolition sector. Below is a graph of the recycling and recovery rates of each source stream according to the [National Waste Report](#).





What about bubble wrap. Especially bubble wrap inside paper packaging envelopes.? Best way to dispose of this.

Bubble wrap can be recycled through REDcycle, BUT is very important to note that they only accept consumer quantities and they need to be a maximum size of an A3 document. If you are a business, unfortunately, you cannot make use of their services through the bins at participating stores.

Bubble wrap from paper envelopes, can only be recycled if you remove them from the envelope, and dispose of it in the soft plastics bins at participating stores. If you don't. it has to go in the landfill bin.

What about polystyrene?

Polystyrene cannot be recycled via our home recycling bin, you can see if there is a transfer station near you as they tend to accept them. Fortunately, polystyrene is on the list of problem plastics to be phased out in 2022. To find out more about the polystyrene recycling, barriers and drop off locations, click [here](#).

Can you please share the link to the MRF video?

The link for the MRF sorting video can be found here, on the Planet Ark YouTube page: <https://youtu.be/asO-GUnKn1c>

Can we recycle paper towels into yellow bin, we are a preschool and have too many to put into compost bin and worms.

No. Unfortunately, like napkins, paper towels are made of short fibre material which contaminates the quality of the recycled bales processed at MRFs. Also, depending on what they are used for, whatever they are used to clean will contaminate the recycling bin.

As an alternative, try using washable rags and wipes to reduce the number of paper towels you use. Also, depending on what's on them, you could also store them separately and put them in your worm farm or compost bin at a staggered pace.

Are there any paper products that can't be recycled?

Yes and no, it is important to understand that just the material type doesn't determine the recyclability of an item, there are many factors that can affect the outcome such as shape, weight, laminates, inks etc.

Having said that, below a few paper items that are not recyclable, and some that are but you need to do some prep:



Not Recyclable

- Napkins, tissues or paper towels
- Laminated sheets
- Any paper packaging with the [ARL](#) featuring the 'bin' symbol.
- Shredded paper – Can be composted instead or recycled ONLY in paper bins collected separately.
- Take away paper packaging- As it is usually soiled with food, they cannot be recycled, but they can be composted.
- Waxed paper.
- Cardboard boxes filled with stuff, doesn't matter if it is all paper, never fill cardboard boxes, they should always be empty.
- Receipts.

Needs some Prep

- Paper envelope with plastic padding- Remove ALL the padding and only keep the paper
- Shopping bags: If handles are not made from paper, they need to be removed.
- Super sturdy cardboard box (like the one your mobile phone comes in) needs to be flattened otherwise will end up with other material containers.
- Post it notes: They can be recycled if you place them inside a used envelope, by themselves they are too small to be captured.

What about wrapping paper?

As long as it is paper, it is fine to recycle, BUT try to reuse it for other presents before you even consider recycling it!

Is there anything be done with non-recyclable plastic rather than going into landfill? Such as broken coat hangers or toys.

Not really, unless you have huge volumes to justify a collection (E.g., a company that makes CDs would probably have enough cd scraps to generate proper volumes, but an individual wouldn't). Whenever possible try to source items that are harder to break so that you don't have this issue.



Will the ARL (Australasian Recycling Label) be enforced on imported products?

The ARL program is a voluntary scheme, if a brand imports a product they can add the ARL to them, there are many imported products with the ARL already.

Where can you recycle disposable cigarette lighters and eyedropper bottles? You can't.

Generally, eyedroppers and cigarette lighters cannot be recycled.

For items like cigarette lighters we would suggest investing in refillable lighters or matches.

Do you have anyone who goes to schools and teaches this to kids? Unfortunately, we do not have the capacity and manpower to do this. However by visiting our [At School Resources](#) page, you can access many curriculum aligned activities and lesson plans.

If I organise my mattress to be collected by council, will it be taken to a recycling centre?

Most councils would provide 'council pick-ups' for bulky items, you can check [RecyclingNearYou.com.au](https://recyclingnearyou.com.au) to see if your council has access to a recycling centre.

If councils offer specific mattress pick-up or drop-off service outside of general clean-up collection, then they will be recycled, same with e-waste and whitegoods.

General council clean-up collection isn't recycled if you put any of those items out for that service.

What was the website for the cooking oil?

You can head to <https://recyclingnearyou.com.au/cooking-oil>

How can we find out more about different types of plastics?

<https://recyclingnearyou.com.au/plastic> has information and more links about plastic.

We would like to stress again that just because something is made from a certain type of plastic, it does not mean if it can be recycled or not. Check for the ARL on your packaging to know which bin it goes in. A reminder that our home recycling bins is for packaging only (and paper items) that generally comes from the kitchen, bathroom, and laundry.



Is there a group or forum where people can ask questions about recycling and share ideas and links, as we have in this chat?

Best thing you can do is to ask your council directly, most councils have waste educators and coordinators who are qualified to provide this information. Facebook groups can also be a source of ideas, but always check with your local council about those if you want to implement them as sometimes the information in those groups is not 100% accurate or not appropriate for your area.

Are paper coffee cups still a problem for MRFs?

The main issue with coffee cups is their shape, the bottom is quite strong and doesn't allow the cup to collapse (which is good, otherwise we would get our coffee all over the place!), paper is correctly sorted when it is flat and in a 2D shape, to avoid any issues, many councils have opted not to accept them, check locally to see the rules in your area. Alternatively, some companies and programs, like 7/11, or RecycleMe who provide drop-off options for your coffee cups so they can be specially sorted to ensure the resources are recycled to their best quality.

What is the reason lids are not always accepted at MRFs?

Lids by themselves (bottle tops) are too small, anything smaller than a credit card will fall through the 'cracks' and won't be captured correctly.

Can I leave lids on the plastic bottles to recycle?

This highly varies council to council, check your local guidelines. Bottle tops can be left attached to drink bottles so that they are part of a larger container, but you have to scrunch the bottle and replace the cap, this way they will not be popping out if squished as you have removed the air inside and you'll also ensure there are no liquids left. For more sturdy bottles like a shampoo bottle, it should be fine to leave the lid attached. Only do this if the lid is smaller than a credit card and both items are made from the same material, if it is the same size or larger, is best to separate it.

Can you put Tetra Pak (soy milk) in the recycling bin?

'Fresh cartons' are accepted by most councils, long-life cartons are not widely accepted and you'll need to check with your local council. The good news is that there are plans for a new facility next year (2022) to process ALL types of cartons and transform them into construction materials. You can read more about that [here](#).



Where can you recycle old underwear? I know there are many other plants/companies that recycle textiles, but many don't accept underwear? Places like H&M and Zara will take (clean) underwear and shred them for other purposes like construction insulation or generate energy from waste.

Fabric scraps, old mattress protectors, torn and damaged clothing, etc. Council asks you don't put into general rubbish collection. Where do I take these textiles?

For any damaged clothing, you can take them H&M and Zara or Upparel for recycling. Vets and animal shelters often appreciate old linens and towels as long as they are clean. Sheridan takes old sheets and towels for recycling. Always double check your area before going to these stores by contacting them or [Recycling Near You](#).

Can you recycle old pillows that are not in good condition?

Unfortunately, not. Vets and animal shelters generally do not accept doonas and pillows. They only take towels and blankets. If you are unsure, you can always call ahead to see what they are willing to accept. Alternatively, you can always reuse the stuffing for your craft needs.

What can do I with my old worn out sweat bands?

Unfortunately, they are not recyclable and most likely need to go to landfill.

Wouldn't most papers and cardboard be contaminated with food, water, and oils when they are mixed with other products in the recycling truck and therefore make them unrecyclable?

For most takeaway cardboard/paper packaging, the food waste that remains such as grease and oils cannot be recycled as they will contaminate the bin. If you can separate the greasy sections from the 'clean' sections, then they can be recycled, the greasy bits will need to go to your waste bin. This type of greasy cardboard can also go into the FOGO bin, if your council has supplied you with one.

What's happening to all the plastic PPE from the pandemic? How to recycle/dispose of face masks?

They are not wildly recyclable, there are some programs provided by Terracycle, although you need to pay for them. There is no wildly available solution at this stage except to use reusable ones if it is possible.



Can fridge magnets (like you receive in the mail) be recycled?

No, they cannot. Suggest investing in a 'no junk mail' sticker to avoid receiving unwanted magnets.

What's the rule with recycling yoghurt containers and plastic/glass bottles? lids on or off?

Always look for the ARL first, if your container does not have it does not mean it won't have it in the future, so keep looking out for it every time you are at the bin. In the meantime, if the lid is small, we would advise not to put that in the bin. It should be fine to leave the lids on, but check with your local council.

Metal screw top bottle lids, can they be recycled like aluminium foil? Correct, provided they are aluminium, you can simply add them to an aluminium foil or wrap them in it so that create a ball (minimum size: golf ball). For steel lids, you can put them inside a steel can and squish the top so that they do not come out.

Chip packets and soft wrapping that are silver lined, are they the same as soft plastics?

Yes, but make sure you check for the ARL as some of those items may have a higher percentage of aluminium or other polymers not accepted by REDcycle, so always look for the ARL first to avoid wish cycling.

My local community hub is no longer taking empty blister packs. Is there somewhere that I can take them?

Yes, you can send them to [Flora&Fauna](#), [Biome](#) or [Banish](#).

What about dirty cardboard with food scraps?

It can only be composted, if it has meat and dairy residue, you can only compost it through a FOGO bin. If it is just veggies and fruit residue (or a TINY bit of oil) it can go in your home compost bin.



Is there any lobbying under way to prohibit plastic-coating of paper packaging (eg. Apple computer/accessory boxes, business cards) which make it either tedious to pull apart on a bored day ...or throw into landfill? Not at the moment, however Australia has packaging targets to make ALL packaging recyclable, reusable or compostable by 2025.

Are glass bottles recycled with the lid on or off?

If it is a plastic lid, it needs to be off, and the lid goes in your waste bin.

A metal lid can be left on or off, however best practice is to remove them and place them in a can or wrap them in aluminium foil, depending on the type of metal, before putting them in the recycling bin.

Does it need to be super clean to be recycled though (e.g. hummus dip tubs)?A quick rinse is more than enough, the trick is to avoid any potential product dripping onto the rest of the recyclables.

Can you scrunch up tin [foil?] and put in a can e.g., steel can for recycling?

Aluminium foil should always go with aluminium, it should not be placed in a steel can. If you have those lids from cans that can be peeled off, those are made from steel and can be put inside a steel can.

What if the aluminium foil is dirty? Do you still scrunch it?

If the aluminium foil has too much food residue and heaps of oil, it often cannot be recycled. If it can be scrapped clean with minimal contamination, then it can be recycled.

What happens to dark tinted glass bottles that are not recyclable? Are they down-cycled or landfill?

Depends on where you are and what systems are available, if captured, they can be used to make road base.

What about milk bottle lids? Does flattening milk bottles to create more space in the recyclable bin create an issue?

Refer to the answer above regarding bottles. It is important never to flatten bottles as the machines will think they are paper, a simple scrunch is the best thing you can do, it will minimize volume while keeping a 3D shape.



I thought the plastic lids were a different type of plastic to the bottles e.g. PET with a different plastic lid. That's why I thought they had to be separated?

It depends on the processing facility, remember the MRF only separates materials, they then go to the actual recycling facility. Depending on where you are, there might be one available in the area or not. A bale of bottles with no lids will have a higher value and the MRF can sell it at a higher price because it is 'purer' and needs less re-processing. The way plastic is recycled, is by getting shredded and then put in a caustic bath, different plastics will float at different temperatures and that's how they get separated.

What exactly makes it harder to recycle post recycling (consumer)? Like chemical modifications? Durability?

It is mostly quality, safety and the fact that packaging sometimes is not made from one single material. E.g., it is easier to recycle PET scraps from the manufacturing stage as all of it is one type of polymer and one single colour, it has not have had any contact with any food or chemicals, so it is food-safe. Post-consumer recyclable materials are harder to recover as the packaging needs to be separated from any additional materials, there is a mix of colours and it may or may not have been exposed to hazardous materials, so there are limited applications for them.

Can you recycle the clean plastic takeaway container? if you have wiped the oils/ sauces off?

Yes, you can, we would recommend leaving the lid attached as well.

What about champagne corks or wine lids

Cork is not recyclable, but if it is 100% cork you can compost them, be very careful as there are many cork imitations made from plastic. Many wine bottles now have aluminium lids, follow the advice mentioned above for those.

Can foil wrappers be recycled?

Yes, they can, but make sure they are actual foil. You can add them into a ball until you have a golf-sized ball and put them in your recycling bin. Some foil looking wrappers, like for chip packets, cannot be recycled as they are made from plastic. Depending on the packaging they may be considered soft plastics instead.