

From trash to treasure – the growing world of recycling!

EARTH FIRST

By Susan Sanders, ECCO

Have you ever wondered what becomes of your recycling waste? Nearly every Australian household recycles 95% of items according to consulting report presented to the Federal Government last year. But shutting the lid on the Council recycling bin, with its cargo of paper, cardboard, plastic, aluminium and metal cans, glass and plastic drink containers is where being green about waste ends for most of us.

As a nation we also dispose of 21 million tonnes of un-recycled items each year, more than half of what we produce, and most of that goes directly to landfill where it is either buried in a slow decomposing system, or buried in a dry tomb to prevent decomposition.

What are we doing about the 4.2 million tonnes of food packaging, 179,300 tonnes of white goods, millions of tonnes of electrical items (e-waste), and 77,000 tonnes of car batteries that we discard every year? Many items destined for landfill can be re-used, recycled or transformed into other products.

'Reverse Garbage' is a not-for-profit organisation operating in Sydney's inner west. They collect and sell industrial and commercial discards, including plastics, fabrics leather, wood, paper, electrical goods, office furniture and paint. The group has been operating for more than 30 years and saves more than 12,000 cubic metres of waste going to landfill each year and has a turnover of almost \$1 million which is reinvested into re-use products.

Reverse Garbage sells to teachers, renovators, artists, designers, advertisers, film producers and householders. Most of the items they collect are re-used and prevented from filling our landfills and waste facilities.

There are many groups operating recycling systems to re-use car tyres, e-waste, plastic materials, and more. Throughout Australia, re-use and recycling systems have been developed to:

- Turn unwanted music equipment (mainly LPs and singles) into handmade bowls, coasters, jewellery and more.
- Use ash residue from coal burnt to produce electricity (also called slag) which is crushed, mixed with cement and baked into building and landscaping products.
- Re-use PVC plastic for hardy bags. PVC is tough and UV resistant, and is used for posters through to seat belts.
- Convert wine corks into flooring. One of the worlds largest wine cork recycling plants in Melbourne converts used bottle stoppers into flooring.
- Slice up and re-use old car tyres to create shoe soles and rubber tracks for sporting arena's. A single car tyre yields six pairs of men's size nines.

For further information about the world of recycling, see

- www.reversegarbage.org.au
- www.orange.nsw.gov.au / Waste and Resource Recovery
- www.netwaste.org.au/index.htm

Reducing waste

You can also reduce the amount of waste going to landfills and the need for recycling. Simple things you can do include purchasing products with limited packaging, avoid disposable products, buy items made from recycled goods, composting at home, and always use your council provided recycle bin. For further information about things you can do, go to

www.cleanup.org.au/au/LivingGreener/organic-waste.html

Green tip for the week:

National recycling Week is in November – However there are dozens of things you can do all year round to recycle. See www.recyclingweek.planetark.org/recycling-info

Future Environmental Event:

World Heritage Day - www.gdrc.org/doyourbit/18_4-heritage.html

Earth Day – April 22 (go to www.earthday.org)

ECCO General Meeting, April 28, Orange Showground ELF centre from 730pm.