

Recycling Behaviours Report 2024

Australians and recycling:
attitudes, behaviours and outlook



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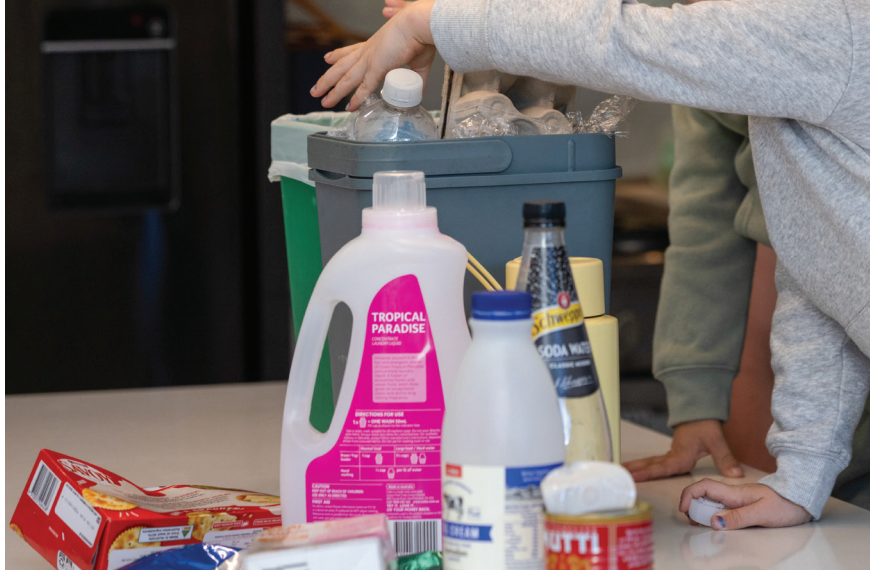
INTRODUCTION

The Recycling Behaviours Report

For the fourth year running, Cleanaway and the Clean Energy Finance Corporation (CEFC) have conducted research into Australians' recycling behaviours. These valuable insights regarding people's everyday recycling challenges help to shape Cleanaway's priorities when delivering waste education. Such education and awareness will assist Australians in making correct recycling decisions that can contribute to creating an on-shore circular economy.

This report summarises research conducted between February and March 2024, across a representative sample of 1,000 adults residing in all states of Australia (in both metro and regional locations). To allow for comparative year-on-year insights, questions regarding general attitudes and behaviours surrounding recycling and sustainability from previous years were repeated. This year, focus was placed on participant knowledge and understanding around the correct disposal of batteries and battery-operated devices. It also explored how Australians are using state-based Container Deposit Schemes – both of which are topical to the waste industry.

All Australians have a role to play in recycling and sustainability and as the nation's largest waste management company, Cleanaway is proud to be a trusted resource for the public and the waste industry. Cleanaway maintains valuable waste and recycling education resources such as the free e-learning platform *Greenius* and the digital Recycling Hub as a one-stop destination for general recycling questions. We continue to partner with complementary organisations such as *Clean Up Australia* and the *Battery Stewardship Council* (B-cycle) to increase the reach of our educational messaging and continue empowering our nation in making a sustainable future possible together.



About Cleanaway

Cleanaway is Australia's leading total waste management provider, offering waste disposal and resource recovery solutions for a wide range of stakeholders and industries. Having supported Australian businesses for more than 50 years, Cleanaway can confidently deliver waste management solutions that not only offer extraordinary benefits to customers, but the wider community. Cleanaway views waste with a different mindset to others, asking the question 'what can it be next?' rather than 'where does it go now?'. With this mindset, a 7,500+ strong workforce, national fleet network of over 6,000 vehicles, and 130 prized assets across the nation, Cleanaway is assisting Australia's transition to a more sustainable future.

About the Clean Energy Finance Corporation

The CEFC is an experienced specialist investor with a deep sense of purpose, investing in Australia's transition to net zero emissions by 2050. With access to more than \$30 billion from the Australian Government, it's backing economy-wide decarbonisation, from renewable energy and natural capital to energy efficiency, alternative fuels and low carbon materials. The CEFC invests with commercial rigour, aiming to deliver a positive return across its portfolio.

Since 2017, the CEFC has been working with Cleanaway to support waste education efforts, such as the Recycling Behaviours Report. Through this investment, Cleanaway and the CEFC aim to reduce waste going to landfill and create a sustainable future for Australians.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Encouragingly, Australians have developed a better understanding and increased awareness of the circular economy concept and continue to view recycling as important. This year's Recycling Behaviours Report, as with previous years, shows there are still areas where knowledge and subsequent actions could be improved.

Recycling information and knowledge

Confusion around recycling rules is still a major barrier to Australians becoming better recyclers. While the proportion of people reporting confusion has decreased by 10% since last year (28% in 2024 vs 38% in 2023), other results from this research suggest misconceptions and knowledge gaps may still be compromising Australians' efforts.

Product labelling confusion was demonstrated when respondents were shown a Plastics Identification Code (symbol for PVC), with 80% incorrectly believing it to be a recycling symbol. Other significant gaps in recycling knowledge included underestimating item breakdown time in landfill and failing to correctly dispose of everyday items such as coffee cups. When asked what would help people to recycle more, 40% indicated they want clearer product labelling, and 37% want clearer and more consistent information.

Battery recycling poses a challenge

Overall, Australians know that batteries and other electronic devices (such as mobile phones) should not be placed in kerbside bins. However, with 45% of people not knowing where to go to take their batteries, mobile phones and laptops for safe disposal and recycling, and 39% indicating taking batteries to drop-off locations is inconvenient, there seems to be a gap in consumer knowledge and process efficiency. This gap could mean people are placing these items into their household bins even if they know they shouldn't, which has serious ramifications. Approximately a third of respondents are not aware that placing batteries in kerbside bins can start fires.



Incentives are motivating Australians

Awareness of Container Deposit Schemes (CDS) is high in states where they are available, with 88% of people knowing they exist and over half having used them (52%). People who have used the CDS describe the process as easy and efficient. The most common motivator to participate is the financial incentive and results show increased accessibility (through more locations or kerbside collections) and higher rebates (10c to 20c) would motivate further use of the schemes.

What's stopping us?

Aside from gaps in knowledge, the main barriers to recycling correctly are a lack of faith in the system and a lack of appropriate, accessible recycling infrastructure. Nearly half of Australians (41%) don't trust that their recycling will be properly recycled. Some respondents have said their mistrust is driven by the enduring effects of recent high-profile recycling scandals and a lack of faith in one another to recycle correctly.

Additionally, infrastructure remains a source of concern: 49% of people identify lack of infrastructure as a barrier to recycling, and 37% find it hard to get everything that should be recycled to the right place. Improved home recycling services (e.g. bigger and more specialised bins) and more prevalent and accessible drop-off points would motivate people to recycle more.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS



35%

believe it is difficult to find clear recycling instructions



41%

don't trust their waste will be properly recycled (18% believe it all goes to landfill)



46%

don't know that major retailers such as supermarkets can be battery drop off points



60%

are completely or very likely to participate in the CDS in the next 12 months



40%

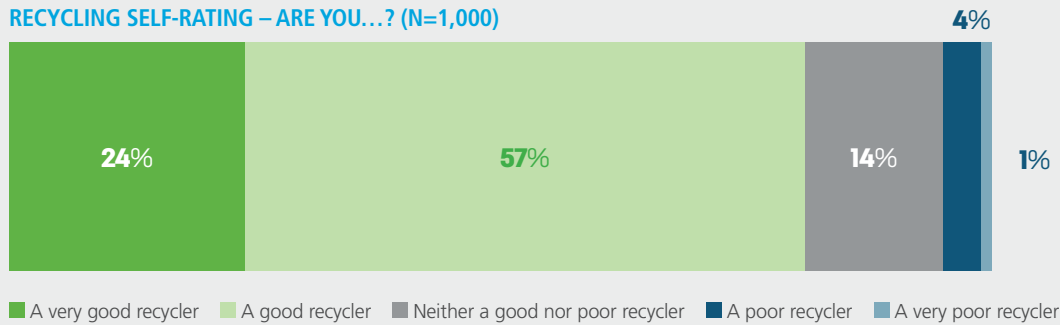
say incentives would help them to recycle more

RECYCLING AND WASTE DISPOSAL BEHAVIOURS

Australians think they are good at recycling – and that’s a problem

Most Australians think they are good recyclers - a perception that has continued to strengthen over time. However, despite this belief, 2024 survey results indicate there are still knowledge gaps and mistakes being made.

RECYCLING SELF-RATING – ARE YOU...? (N=1,000)



This year, 81% of Australians rated themselves as good or very good recyclers. This figure has been gradually increasing each year, with only 74% rating themselves as good or very good in 2021. There were increases in the number of people rating themselves as 'very good', and young people in general giving themselves a high rating. However, further survey questions revealed this confidence is not necessarily reflected in people's disposal behaviours.

More than a third of Australians are consistently skipping the necessary steps to make sure items they recycle are processed safely and correctly.

People's waste disposal behaviours remain largely consistent with 2023 results. Despite the higher self-rating pronounced in those aged 18-34, they were still the least likely to engage in each of the above behaviours showing a clear discrepancy between their own perceptions and actions.



33%

of Australians **don't empty or rinse recyclable containers** before putting them in the recycling bin most or every time



38%

of Australians **don't check for the recycling symbols** to see where an item should be recycled before disposing of it most or every time



24%

of Australians **don't check local recycling rules** for items they're unsure about most or every time



38%

of Australians **don't separate the components of a single product** to recycle or dispose of in the appropriate bin most or every time



40%

of Australians **don't separate soft plastic and film from hard plastic** before recycling most or every time

Our actions in reality

Survey participants were asked how they would dispose of everyday items in a sorting task, putting the spotlight on actions rather than intentions.

Packaging associated with takeaway food and beverages remains a point of confusion, as do soft plastics.

It's clear from the research that access to specialised recycling bins influenced people's responses to the sorting task. For example, while 15% said they would place garden cuttings in the general waste bin, this fell to 2% among those who have a FOGO or garden organics bin at home.



Sorting task results



Paint cans

41% don't take them to specialised recycling



Takeaway coffee cups

48% incorrectly put these in the mixed recycling bin



Takeaway paper drink cups

58% incorrectly put them in the mixed recycling bin



Soft plastics

33% incorrectly put these in the mixed recycling bin



Bread bag

23% incorrectly put these in the mixed recycling bin

MOTIVATIONS FOR RECYCLING

What makes us want to recycle?

For the first time since the survey commenced, helping the environment has come out on top as the main motivator for Australians to recycle – closely followed by believing it is the right thing to do, and wanting to minimise waste going to landfill. In last year's findings, 'it's the right thing to do' was the primary motivator, and 'to help the environment' was the third most popular choice. This could suggest that recycling is starting to resonate as a way to create a positive environmental impact.

WHAT MOTIVATES AUSTRALIANS TO RECYCLE



75%

To help the environment



74%

It's the right thing to do



71%

Minimise waste going to landfill

What could help us to recycle more?

When asked what would help people to recycle more, the two primary motivators identified by Australians were 'incentives to do so' and 'clearer product labelling' (both 40%). The importance of incentives has increased by 5% since 2023.

Desire for incentives is also reflected in people's reasons for participating in Container Deposit Schemes. Financial incentives were the primary motivator for 63% of respondents, while 61% reported they would be much more likely to participate if the rebate increased from 10c to 20c per item.

The increased importance of incentives is likely the result of cost of living pressures. Recycling can be a time-consuming activity, particularly if people need to travel to specific drop-off locations, and Australians want the effort to be worth their time.

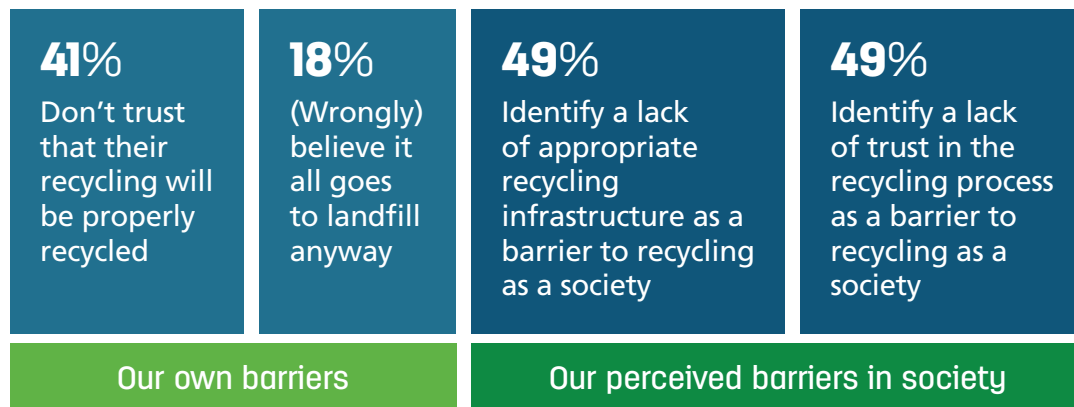
WHAT WOULD HELP AUSTRALIANS RECYCLE MORE?

1.	Incentives to do so	40%
2.	Clearer product labelling	40%
3.	Clearer/more consistent information	37%
4.	Access to home recycling bins for specific materials	35%
5.	If I had proof my items were actually being recycled	33%

TRUST IN RECYCLING

Australians lack trust in the system and each other

Trust in the recycling system remained stable compared to 2023, although there is room for improvement. Two in five Australians (41%) don't believe their recycling will be properly recycled (43% in 2023), and 18% think 'it all goes to landfill anyway' (20% in 2023).



Ongoing effects of controversy

Over a year on from the REDcycle program's closure, and five years on from the controversy around shipping our recycling overseas, the effects are still visible in respondents' mistrust of the Australian recycling system. Unfortunately, there are limited specialised recycling options available to the public when it comes to soft plastics, however, this remains an area of focus for Cleanaway. Cleanaway and Viva Energy Australia have recently entered into an agreement where a pre-feasibility assessment of circular solutions for soft plastics will be undertaken. The study builds Cleanaway's experience piloting new collection methods for this difficult to recycle waste stream and aims to create an end-to-end circular soft plastics solution by transforming them into food grade polypropylene at the Viva Geelong refinery.

Perception of widespread contamination issues

A major concern among Australians is that their recycling will end up in landfill. There are various reasons why some people have this misconception - some think it was always the intention, reporting seeing one truck collect both recycling and waste bins, while some fear contamination. People lack trust in the commitment or capacity of their neighbours to recycle correctly, leading them to believe their own efforts are in vain as there will be contamination regardless.

Knowing too much, or not enough

For some Australians, lack of trust in the recycling system comes from deeper knowledge of the process, rather than a lack of understanding. Their concern stems from awareness of waste volumes and the costs involved throughout various processing stages. On the other hand, there are those who are wary as they have no proof of what happens to their recycling after it leaves their bin.

"I have heard a story on TV about plastic recycling where it was supposed to be recycled but all that happened was that it got stored at a large warehouse."

– 65-69 year old respondent

"I don't think we have the man power or resources to do this and it would be an extra cost."

– 40-44 year old respondent

"I can't tell what happens to it after it gets collected. I can only hope it gets properly recycled."

– 25-29 year old respondent

OTHER BARRIERS TO RECYCLING

Confusion said to be declining, but still prevalent in our actions

While there has been a significant decrease from 2023 results, confusion around recycling is still an issue affecting over a quarter of Australians. Over a third say it is hard to find clear instructions about how to recycle.

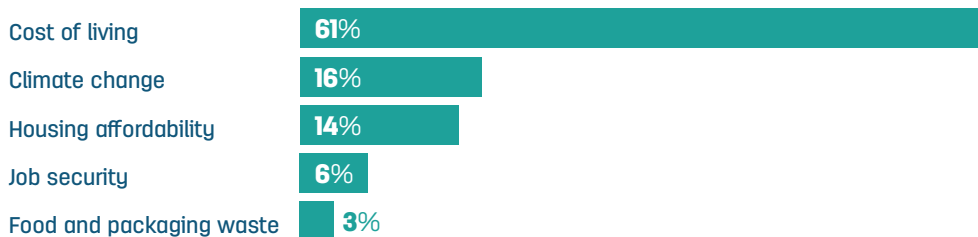


"This is information that should be sent to each home, like they do with the phonebook, including instructions on how to recycle waste appropriately. At the moment, the attitude seems to just be "just google it" which can get confusing because it seems to differ by council area." – 30-34 year old respondent

Cost of living driving our environmental impact

When asked to rank five current issues in order of highest to lowest concern, cost of living was the clear top priority, with 61% ranking it first. Climate change came in second with 16%, and food and packaging waste was the top priority for only 3% of Australians. For younger Australians, climate change was an even lower priority, coming in behind housing affordability as well.

Issue of highest concern (n=1000)



This concern with cost of living and the prioritisation of saving money is driving Australians' uptake of some sustainable behaviours. A high proportion of people report engaging in sustainable behaviours such as buying second-hand (60%) and repairing rather than replacing (84%). Since 2023, there has been a 6% increase in people avoiding buying things they don't need, with 73% saying they do this most/every time in 2024.

However, budget concerns are also driving Australians to some less sustainable behaviours. Half of respondents report purchasing cheaper items that are not sustainably produced over more expensive sustainable alternatives (51%). They also report buying cheaper items that will wear out/break down sooner, rather than costly alternatives that could last longer (46%).

SPECIALISED RECYCLING

Access to specialised recycling bins

Every household around Australia has access to a different range of waste disposal services, depending on factors such as the council they live in and whether their home is a free-standing house or an apartment. While almost every Australian has access to general rubbish and mixed recycling bins (98% and 89% respectively), access to specialised recycling bins, like those for glass, e-waste, or food and garden organics, is far more varied. In 2024, 45% of Australians report having access to a separate bin for garden organics, 18% for food organics, and 35% had access to a food and garden organics bin (FOGO). 26% of people reported a bin for paper and cardboard, 15% for glass, and just 8% a separate bin for e-waste (the majority of whom live in an apartment). Aside from paper and cardboard, specialised recycling bin access and use has had small increases on 2023 results, hopefully indicating a trend toward increased accessibility.

More bins = more recycling

While Australians generally report being satisfied with their bin options (67% very or somewhat satisfied), wider access to a variety of bins at home still emerged as a key factor that would motivate people to recycle more. Those with access to at least one specialised recycling bin (such as paper and cardboard only, glass or e-waste) reported higher levels of satisfaction regarding their current access to waste management options, compared with those who only have a general waste and mixed recycling bin (66% vs 49%).

Dwelling type impacts recycling access

Australians who live in apartment buildings with communal waste facilities are more likely to have access to specialised bins for paper and cardboard, food organics, glass, and e-waste – though it is still a minority of apartment-dwellers who have access to these bins. On the other hand, those living in free-standing houses are more likely to have FOGO or garden organics bins. This was reflected in the rate of food composting (or use of their FOGO bin): Only 44% of people in houses said they didn't compost, compared to 65% who said they didn't compost living in apartments.

For those who do not participate in food composting, when asked why, the primary reasons given were lack of access to FOGO kerbside services, and having no space to make or use home compost.

Do you compost any of your food waste? (N=1000)

Yes, I put waste in a FOGO bin



Yes, I have my own composting bin and/or worm farm that I use to make compost



No



■ Free-standing house (n=663) ■ Semi-detached, row or terrace house, townhouse (n=117) ■ Apartment, flat or unit (n=214)

68%

had a FOGO, FO or GO bin provided to their household

35%

of Australians say they would be motivated to recycle more if they had access to home recycling bins for specific materials

37%

say it's hard to get everything that should be recycled to the right place for recycling

Knowledge of recycling symbols and process still challenging Australians

There are a few waste-related areas that continue to pose a challenge for many Australians. This starts with knowing what happens to items in the kerbside recycling bin after it is collected. A third of Australians (37%) either don't know what is done with these items, or believe that they go somewhere other than a recycling facility in Australia – with most of this group wrongly thinking their recycling is taken to an Australian landfill.

As in 2023, Australians vastly underestimate the time it takes for common items to break down in landfill. For example, only 17% of people know it takes a wet wipe 100 years to break down in landfill, and only 6% know it takes a disposable mask 450 years to break down. The median estimates for both items were only 10 years.



The universal recycling symbol

There is also confusion around the meanings of certain symbols. A key source of misunderstanding that few Australians are informed about is the similarity of the Plastics Identification Code (PIC) symbols to the universal recycling symbol. The universal recycling symbol is used to either identify items eligible for recycling or if they are made from recycled materials, while the PIC appears on most plastic items and is used to identify what sort of plastic they are derived from. Depending on the council, some plastic types can be disposed of in the kerbside recycling, while others cannot.

Respondents were shown the symbol for PVC, a type of plastic that *cannot* be placed in kerbside recycling as it contains harmful chemicals. This test revealed four in five Australians think the PIC symbol for PVC (code 3) is a recycling symbol, and one in two would dispose of an item with that symbol in the kerbside recycling bin. It is important that education surrounding the differences of symbols is strengthened in the community to reduce contamination of recycling waste streams.



The Plastics Identification Code symbol for items made of PVC, or Polyvinyl Chloride

Is this a recycling symbol? (N=498)



■ Correct answer/s
■ Incorrect answer/s

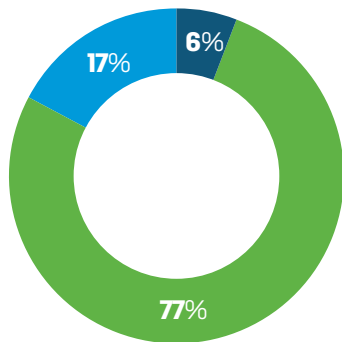


Knowing the need for specialised recycling

Battery and battery embedded device disposal is an area of particular concern to both the waste industry and the community. This is due to the potential ramifications of incorrect disposal, which has seen an increasing number of fires across waste collection networks. Encouragingly, the majority of Australians are aware of how to correctly dispose of batteries and rechargeable devices such as mobile phones and laptops – 77% know they cannot be placed in kerbside bins. When given a waste sorting task, more than four in five people say they would sort batteries (82%), laptops (83%) and mobile phones (84%) correctly by depositing them at a specialised drop-off location.

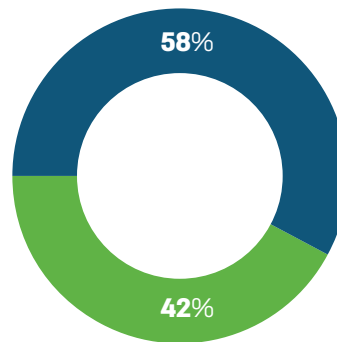
Can batteries or rechargeable devices be placed in kerbside bins? (N=1000)

■ Yes (incorrect) ■ No (correct) ■ Unsure



Do you know where your nearest specialised drop-off locations are for loose batteries? (N=1000)

■ Yes ■ No



Risks of doing the wrong thing

Australians are generally informed on why proper disposal is important. Awareness levels are high for the risks of leaking and contamination (77% know that batteries can contaminate the environment, 71% that they can contaminate other items). Knowledge of the risk of fires, however, is lower, with approximately a third of people unaware that this could happen.

As we saw from the sorting task earlier in the report, almost a quarter (24%) of Australians are placing batteries into their kerbside bins, suggesting they may be unaware of the serious and dangerous risks mentioned above.



67%

Know fires can be caused in trucks

66%

Know fires can be caused at processing facilities

61%

Know fires can be caused in the household bin



A gap in knowledge vs. behaviour

While Australians know how they should be disposing of their batteries (in that they don't go in any kerbside bin), results indicate this is not translating to what people actually do with them.

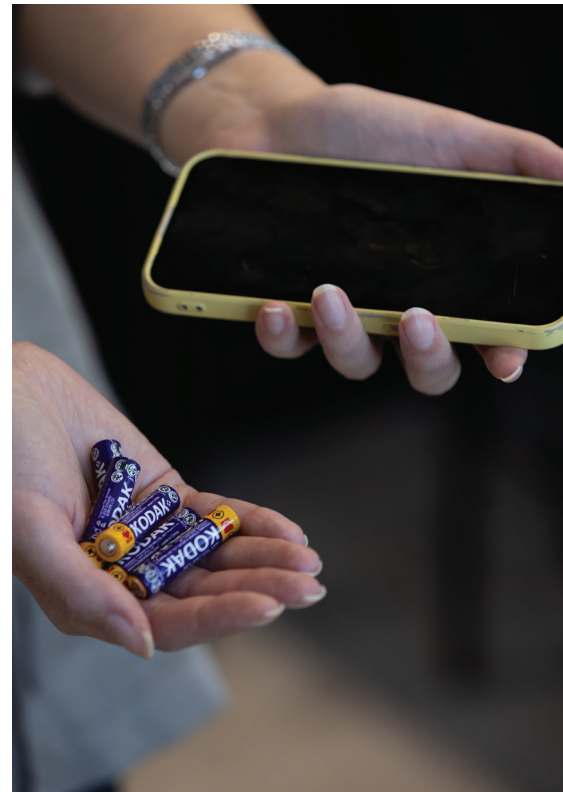
Specialised drop off points are available for returning laptops, mobile phones (battery embedded e-waste items) and batteries, but people don't seem to know where to find these locations, and over half (52%) say they find it difficult to recycle batteries.

Only 58% of people know where their nearest specialised drop-off location for loose batteries is, down to 54% for mobile phones and 48% for laptops.

Accordingly, 'not knowing where to take them' is the primary barrier to proper battery disposal, selected by 45% of respondents. Those who knew their nearest specialised drop-off location were asked where it was. 59% named retailers like Bunnings and Coles, while 22% named public facilities – mostly dedicated recycling centres or tips.

Those who know the correct disposal methods but not where to take them could be stockpiling batteries and battery embedded e-waste in their homes, or throwing them in the kerbside bin for convenience despite knowing that is not where they should go.

Disposing of batteries in kerbside bins whilst knowing there is a specialised recycling method could also be attributed to limited awareness of repercussions, such as fires in collection vehicles and waste sorting facilities, which can place workers and the community at risk. This could be leading people to think their actions are not a big deal.



46%

Don't know major retailers (Bunnings, Woolworths, Coles, ALDI, Big W) accept batteries

49%

Say it's convenient to take laptops to specialised drop-off locations

39%

Report inconvenience as a barrier to taking items to specialised drop-offs

"I'm saving them up rather than putting them in general rubbish, but how are we meant to find out which "selected locations" of these retailers take them? Also, shouldn't local council be providing a cost-free facility for this purpose?" – 65-69 year old respondent

CONTAINER DEPOSIT SCHEMES

Container Deposit Schemes are resonating

Participation in Container Deposit Schemes (CDS) is fairly widespread. Currently NSW, WA, QLD, NT, SA and VIC have schemes in place, with Victoria's scheme having commenced in late 2023. Tasmania is currently the only state or territory without a CDS, with one set to be introduced in 2024. Around half of those living in states with Container Deposit Schemes have used them (52%), while only 12% don't know they exist. Of those who have used the CDS, most appear to be regular users, with 71% having used it more than five times, and over three quarters having used it in the past three months.



People who have used their state's CDS generally find it quick and easy to use - 66% find it 'easy', and 64% find it 'efficient'.

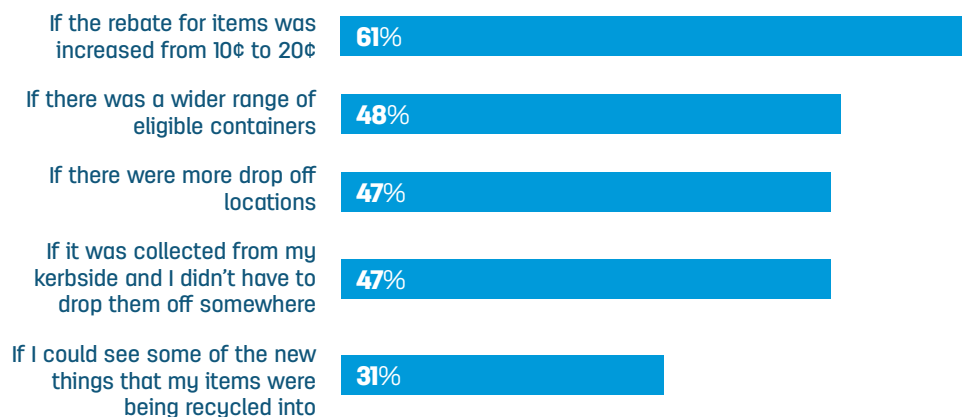
Given we have seen that Australians are motivated by incentives, it is unsurprising that the primary motivator for participating in the CDS is the financial rebate, with 63% of CDS participants listing it as a motivating factor. When considering a range of potential initiatives, increasing the rebate from 10 to 20 cents would be the most persuasive (with 61% of those in CDS states and territories saying it would make them much more likely to participate). This aligns with Australians undertaking sustainable behaviours to combat the rising cost of living, and whilst they might not be aware, helping the environment at the same time.

“The 10¢ Container Deposit Scheme was in use 20-30 years ago in some states. The 10c needs to be indexed more often to encourage financial incentives to recycle” – 60-64 year old respondent

While 39% of those in eligible areas say there are no barriers to participation in the CDS, increased accessibility is still likely to encourage greater uptake; nearly half (47%) say more drop-off locations and introducing kerbside collections would help. It is important to consider these motivators and barriers as the schemes continue to develop, in the hope of converting the 36% of the population (in CDS participating states) who have heard of the scheme but are yet to use it.

Overall, initiatives such as CDS should be highlighted as exemplary in working toward a circular economy, as well as be used to demonstrate the positive outcome of recycling in order to improve Australians' trust in the recycling system. Despite the previously identified doubts people have with the recycling system, people seem to believe CDS products are actually recycled, with only 4% of people thinking nothing happens to them, and 7% that they are dumped offshore.

% Much more likely to participate in CDS if following initiatives were implemented (n=506)



THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY

A concept gaining both recognition and popularity

A circular economy is an economic system in which waste is reduced, and the continual circulation of resources is encouraged through reuse and recycling. A circular economy ensures every product is designed with longevity and quality in mind, so it can become an input for other processes at the end of its life. This differs from a linear economy (or 'take-make-dispose' model), where raw materials are used to make products for short-term use, which are then disposed of in landfill.

Achieving a circular economy in Australia has many benefits:

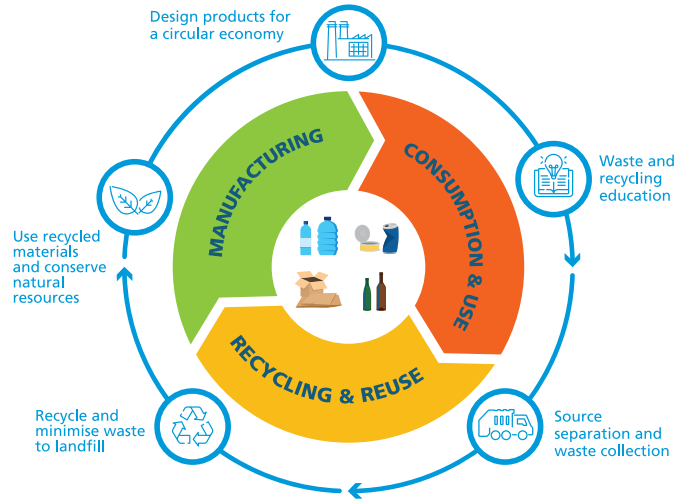
- Reduces our dependence on raw materials and protects the environment
- Reduces the amount of litter polluting ecosystems, and
- Increases local job creation through new recycling and repairing ventures

For the first time across the four years of our research, the majority of people are familiar with the term 'circular economy'.

52% have heard the term, and 31% have at least some idea of what it means.

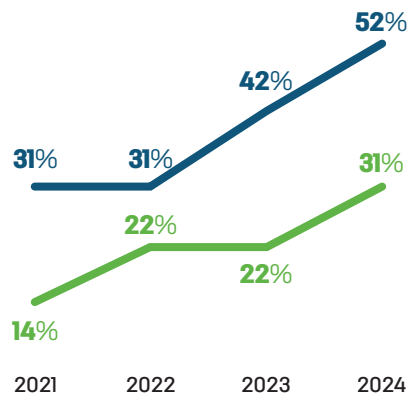
When given the definition of a circular economy, over 99% of people agree it is at least slightly important to implement in Australia, with 84% believing it is very or extremely important.

Since the commencement of Cleanaway's Recycling Behaviours Report in 2021, familiarity with the term 'circular economy' has increased by 20% and knowledge of what it means has more than doubled. This indicates the concept is finally starting to gain traction in the popular consciousness.



Familiarity with the term 'circular economy'

■ Heard of the concept ■ Know what it means



How do we get there?

Education and infrastructure are Australians' top priorities

In order to achieve a circular economy, Australians believe the two highest priorities are educating people on how a circular economy works and how to participate in it, followed by building the necessary infrastructure. People also want attention given to product design and manufacturing. This will ensure manufacturers have recyclability and circularity in mind and would reduce the amount of single-use items being produced and entering landfill.

Australians are looking to the government to implement a circular economy

When asked who is most responsible for implementing a circular economy in Australia, the majority place responsibility on the Federal Government, followed by companies and manufacturers.



“Responsibility should be placed solely on manufacturers and producers who make tonnes and tonnes of the waste to begin with, with no other thoughts other [than] for maximum profits.”

– 25-29 year old respondent

Top priorities to help build a circular economy

Education about how a circular economy works and how to participate in it

23%

Building infrastructure to do the recycling, reprocessing, and manufacture for the circular economy

22%

Ensuring products are designed with circularity in mind

19%

Regulations on the creation of non-recyclable products

18%

Improving access to consumer recycling services

11%

Creating local markets for reuse of recovered materials/items

7%

Most responsible for implementing a circular economy

Federal Government

40%

Companies and manufacturers

26%

Australian consumers/citizens

18%

Local (council) governments

10%

State governments

7%

WASTE HIERARCHY

Recycling isn't the first step

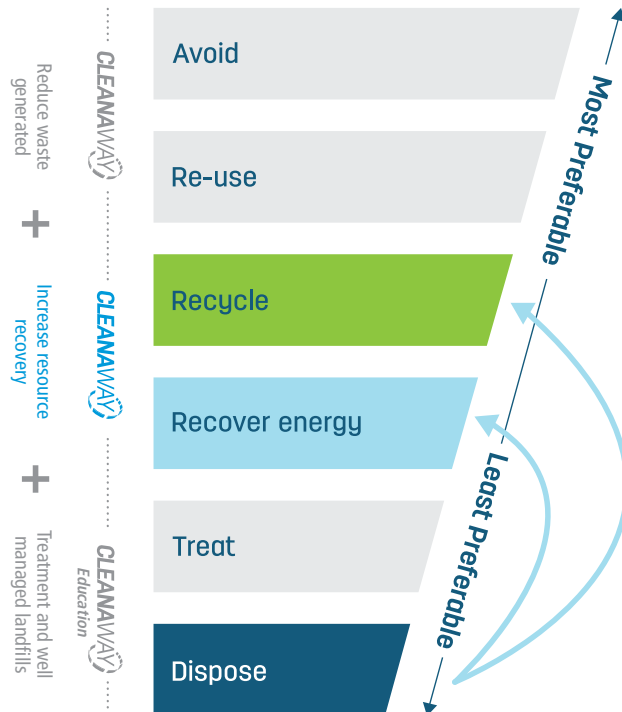
2024 survey responses indicate Australians have some understanding of the importance of reducing and reusing as well as recycling, though their priorities don't reflect the 'most preferable' options in the waste hierarchy.

We asked respondents to rank five different solutions for managing waste, each varying in their level of sustainability according to the waste hierarchy: from 'avoid buying unnecessary or single-use items' as the most sustainable, to 'dispose of waste into landfills' as the least sustainable behaviour.

Results show that while Australians understand the importance of reducing consumption and that disposal to landfill is a last resort, they overestimate the importance of recycling, and undervalue reuse.

Compared to last year's survey, ranking of 'avoid buying unnecessary or single-use items' in first has positively increased, while 'recycle materials in the correct bins' has continued to lose ground. Support for other measures, and the overall rankings, remain the same, though the three middle options are now only a percentage point separated from each other.

The Waste Hierarchy



"I try to recycle and not waste anything but we still need to make more effort to save our environment." – 40-44 year old respondent

Correct Order	Order ranked by Australians				
	1	2	3	4	5
1. Avoid buying unnecessary or single-use items	39%	16%	15%	21%	9%
2. Reuse materials by donating them, upcycling or repurposing	18%	26%	25%	24%	7%
3. Buy products that use recycled packaging or materials	20%	23%	26%	27%	5%
4. Recycle materials in the correct bins to ensure they can be made into something new	19%	29%	26%	19%	7%
5. Dispose of waste into landfill	4%	6%	8%	9%	72%

The above are five options for managing waste in the waste hierarchy. Participants ranked these in order from 1 (best option) to 5 (the worst).

SUMMARY

This year's Recycling Behaviours Report demonstrates that Australians appear more confident with their ability to recycle correctly, with self-reported confusion down from 2023. Despite this, and the intention to do the right thing, mistakes are still being made and people are failing to understand common concepts and symbols.

Confusion around labelling and the disposal of common items such as coffee cups and takeaway containers are still posing challenges. Continuing on from 2023 results, Australians' continued lack of trust in the recycling system is a key issue to be addressed holistically by the waste management industry. There is a consistent demand for education and for the recycling system to prove its value. People want to know what happens to their recycling once it leaves their bin, and are seeking nationally consistent recycling standards.

Specialised recycling and the need to take items to a drop-off location proves to be a challenge. Despite major retailers and supermarkets accepting batteries in designated bins or boxes, many people are still unaware of this service or find it inconvenient. To overcome this, retailers need to draw more attention to the in-store drop off locations, creating more awareness and improved disposal behaviour.

The ease of consumers finding a local specialised drop off location needs to be improved to prevent batteries and embedded e-waste devices from being discarded in kerbside bins. This could be achieved through further education campaigns, and partnerships with drop-off locations and key waste industry stakeholders.

Unsurprisingly, in a time where cost of living is high, an increasing number of people are reporting that incentives would motivate them to recycle more (40%, up 5% from 2023). Incentives have proven to be the main motivator for Australians to engage with their state's Container Deposit Scheme, and increasing the rebate was flagged to be a sure way to improve participation. This demonstrates the value of expanding the items that can be accepted or increasing Container Deposit Scheme reimbursements. To further encourage Australians to do the right thing with batteries and battery embedded devices, a rebate scheme offered by governments or third parties could improve recycling rates, recovery of precious metals from these items, and subsequently reduce fire risk.

Overall, Australians have good intentions when it comes to recycling. However, education is vital in addressing common misunderstandings regarding labelling and the waste hierarchy, which in turn will shape our purchasing behaviour and support a more sustainable nation.



SOLUTIONS

Cleanaway's role in improving our recycling and waste habits

Partnerships and investment to build the circular economy

Cleanaway is continuing to play a role in building the circular economy through meaningful partnerships and investment. Investing in two new plastic processing facilities in Victoria, building out Australia's organic waste processing capability and continuing to play a role in across various state specific Container Deposit Schemes are just a few of the initiatives Cleanaway is undertaking to help create circular solutions.

Cleanaway continues to work alongside B-cycle, Australia's battery stewardship program, to advocate for further reform in the space and promote consistent messaging to consumers around safe disposal of batteries at their B-cycle drop off locations across the country.

Working with industry to promote consistent messaging for consumers

Cleanaway is continuously working with industry partners and bodies to help create consistent messaging to consumers around how to correctly dispose of certain waste streams, such as battery disposal messaging.

Waste and recycling education

Cleanaway is continuing to look to grow trust amongst Australians by driving transparency around what happens to recycling once it leaves the kerbside.

An always-on education campaign is run across Cleanaway's social media to continuously educate on how to best recycle. Additionally, site tours are offered across many Cleanaway facilities at various times of the year, showcasing how waste in Australia is processed for recycling.

Cleanaway has built a range of resources to support schools, communities, businesses and households to recycle correctly. The 'Recycling Hub' is a fast and effective tool for identifying where tricky waste items go and the Greenius e-learning platform provides engaging waste education on what can and can't go in your kerbside bins.

Visit cleanaway.com.au for more information and check out the updated [Greenius module](#) that addresses behaviour around battery recycling.



METHODOLOGY

This report has been prepared with the assistance of Empirica Research who conducted an online survey with a sample of 1,000 Australians in February/March 2024.

Any external sources that have been used are referenced throughout.

1,000 AUSTRALIANS			
GENDER	Male	504	50%
	Female	490	49%
AGE	18-34	281	28%
	35-54	344	34%
	55+	375	38%
STATE/ TERRITORY	NSW	303	30%
	VIC	261	26%
	QLD	189	19%
	WA	107	11%
	SA	78	8%
	ACT	25	3%
	TAS	25	3%
	NT	12	1%
REGION	A capital (metropolitan) city	693	69%
	A regional city, but not a capital	178	18%
	A rural or remote country area	129	13%



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