



Media release

8 May, 2024

RESEARCH REVEALS OUR CONFUSION AROUND BINNING BATTERIES COULD BE TO BLAME FOR INCREASE IN FIRES

New data from Cleanaway shows almost half (45 per cent) of Australians don't know where to go to dispose of batteries, which could be contributing to at least one fire a week.

Australia's largest waste management company [Cleanaway](#), has today released the findings of its *2024 Recycling Behaviours Report*, unveiling the concerning battery disposal habits that are carrying serious consequences.

One in two (52 per cent) Australians say recycling batteries is difficult and almost a quarter (23 per cent) don't know batteries and rechargeable devices cannot be placed in kerbside bins.

When it comes to understanding the dangers of doing the wrong thing, a third of people don't realise that disposing of batteries in kerbside bins can cause fires in trucks (33 per cent) and at processing facilities (34 per cent).

The result is felt through at least one fire per week across Cleanaway's network and more than three battery-related fires per day throughout Australia (as reported by the Australian Council for Recycling) – putting both staff and communities in danger.

The report also revealed items containing lithium rechargeable batteries remain a challenge for Australians, as around half of people couldn't identify their nearest drop-off location for old mobile phones (46 per cent) and laptops (52 per cent).

A lack of awareness of drop-off facilities at major retailers has left Australians feeling like battery disposal is more difficult than it really is. 39 per cent of people say it's inconvenient to take batteries to a specialised drop-off, but nearly one in two (46%) don't know these can be accessed at Bunnings, Big W, or major supermarkets.

Lauren Grimshaw, Senior Education Officer at Cleanaway, says education is key to ensuring all Australians are doing the right thing as we grapple with escalating battery-related fires.

“When people don't know where to take their batteries or devices, or simply think it's too hard, they often incorrectly end up in our household bins. This can cause fires or explosions that ultimately put lives in danger.”

“By identifying the confusion that's come through in our research, we're hoping to educate Australians about engaging with their local drop-off locations to ensure they can recycle unwanted electronics and batteries with confidence,” says Grimshaw.



When batteries are taken to specialised drop-offs, almost all of their components can be recycled and used to make new products. However, three in five (61 per cent) Australians remain unaware of this positive impact of proper disposal.

As Australia grapples with escalating battery-related fires, Libby Chaplin, CEO of B-cycle, Australia's official, nationwide battery recycling Scheme, urges Australians to never put batteries in general waste and recycling bins, to tape the terminals with clear sticky tape, and take them to one of more than 5,000 drop-off points nationwide.

"An increasing number of Australians are joining the movement to recycle their used batteries, yet there's still a significant number who haven't made the switch. As we continue to shed light on the potential risks posed by millions of batteries lingering in our households through our education campaigns, we anticipate a continued uptick in battery recycling rates. Together, let's ensure a safer and more sustainable future by taking action today," Chaplin says.

The Recycling Behaviours Report also uncovered some telling findings when it comes to our everyday recycling habits. While fewer Australians report being confused about recycling (28 per cent in 2024, down from 38 per cent last year), the report shows Australians still need to scrub up on their recycling literacy as common mistakes and misunderstandings continue.

One-third of us remain unaware of the fate of kerbside recycling once it's collected, and four out of five (80 per cent) incorrectly identify a Plastic Identification Code as a recycling symbol. The call for clearer product labelling is evident, with two out of five (40 per cent) saying it would help them recycle more.

Concerningly, almost half of us (48 per cent) are still incorrectly placing takeaway coffee cups in the recycling bin, and a quarter (27 per cent) are not recycling plastic takeaway containers, instead throwing them in landfill. Soft plastics are still a challenge as a third (33 per cent) put these in the mixed recycling bin instead of discarding them with general waste.

In positive signs, Australians are becoming more aware of the circular economy concept with almost one-third (31 per cent) having heard of the phrase and understanding its meaning, doubling in the past four years (15 per cent back in 2021).

Two out of five (40 per cent) say incentives will help them recycle more, with the most common motivation (63 per cent) for participating in local container deposit schemes being the financial incentive. Interestingly, three out of five (61 per cent) say they would be much more likely to participate if the rebate for items was doubled from 10 cents to 20 cents.

As part of its commitment to recycling education, Cleanaway is encouraging all Australians to refer to its recycling e-learning platform [Greenius](#), which contains a dedicated module on battery recycling and other helpful information on how to recycle correctly.

ENDS



Note to editor:

Commissioned by Cleanaway through Empirica Research, an online survey of 1,000 Australians, representative of the Australian population with respect to state/territory and gender, was conducted in February to March 2024.

For media enquiries or interviews, please contact alt/shift/:

Jemima Crawford Smith
0412 852 890
jemima@altshift.com.au

Georgia Gogoll
0488 635 143
georgia.gogoll@altshift.com.au

RECYCLING BEHAVIOURS REPORT KEY FINDINGS

Batteries

- 45% report not knowing where to take batteries/laptops/mobile phones for specialist disposal
- 52% of people find disposal of batteries difficult
- 23% don't know batteries and rechargeable devices cannot be placed in kerbside bins
- 17% are unsure if you can dispose of batteries in kerbside bins or not
- 33% don't realise that disposing of batteries in kerbside bins can cause fires in trucks
- 34% don't realise that disposing of batteries in kerbside bins can cause fires at processing facilities
- 46% did not know of any of the listed retail locations where batteries could be dropped off
- 42% don't know where their nearest Drop off location for batteries is
- 52% don't know where their nearest Drop off location for laptops is
- 46% don't know where their nearest Drop off location for mobile phones is
- 39% say it's inconvenient to take batteries to a specialised drop-off location
- 10% of people are incorrectly disposing of batteries into general waste
- 77% know you cannot dispose of batteries in kerbside bins
- 62% of respondents dispose of batteries through specialist because they believe It's dangerous to dispose of them in other ways

Behaviours and attitudes towards recycling

- 81% of respondents consider themselves to be good recyclers – 57% good and 24% very Good
- Most agree that recycling is important (93%) and that there should be nationally consistent recycling standards (87%)
- 41% don't trust their waste will be properly recycled, and 18% believe it all goes to landfill anyway
- The top motivations to recycle were to help the environment (75%), because it's the right thing to do (74%), and to reduce the amount of waste that goes to landfill (73%)



- Respondents most reported wanting incentives to recycle (40%)
- Over half of respondents in eligible states reported having used the Container Deposit Scheme (52%)
- Clarity around recycling is important, with clearer product labelling (40%) and clearer/more consistent information (37%) nominated as facilitators to recycling
- Respondents also want more transparency in what happens to their recycling, such as having proof their items are actually being recycled (33%) and seeing what happens to them after recycling (29%)
- Lack of infrastructure and lack of trust (both 49%) are the two most commonly perceived barriers to recycling within today's society.

Confusing items:

- The items Australians found most difficult to dispose of without sending them to landfill were chemicals, paint cans, batteries and old clothing and textiles.
 - o 62% found chemicals difficult to recycle
 - o 55% found paint difficult to recycle
 - o 52% found batteries difficult to recycle
 - o 40% found soft plastics difficult to recycle
- 33% incorrectly put soft plastics in recycling bins
- 17% incorrectly disposing of paint in general rubbish
- 48% still incorrectly dispose of takeaway coffee cups in mixed recycling bin
- 58% incorrectly dispose of take away 'paper' drink cups in mixed recycling bin
- 27% incorrectly dispose of takeaway plastic takeaway containers in general rubbish instead of recycling them
- 23% incorrectly disposing of bread bags in mixed recycling instead of general rubbish bin

Recycling symbol confusion:

- 80% incorrectly believe a plastics identification code symbol is a recycling symbol
- 51% incorrectly believe Plastics Identification code 3 can be put in a kerbside recycling bin

Circular economy:

- Nearly half of respondents have never heard of the circular economy (48%)
- Only a third know what the concept means (31%), doubling in the past four years (15 % back in 2021).



- Once provided with a definition of a circular economy, 84% ranked it as very or extremely important to implement in Australia
- The Federal Government is seen as most responsible for this implementation (40%)
- 43% of Australians view building new infrastructure as the top priority for implementing a circular economy