

# Waste Fact Sheet

## What a waste!

We send more and more rubbish 'away' to landfill every year. There is no away, everything ends up somewhere and we are all responsible. Throwing stuff away is not just a case of 'out of sight, out of mind'. Most of the stuff that we throw away takes quite a while to decompose. In fact, some of the stuff that we throw away will be around for much longer than any of us.



Have a look at how long the 'rubbish' on the list below will be around for before it has fully decomposed:

- \* Paper - 2.5 months
- \* Milk Carton - 5 years
- \* Plastic bag - 10-20 years
- \* Tin can - 100 years
- \* Stryofoam - Never
- \* Orange Peel - 6 months
- \* Cigarette Butt - 10-12 years
- \* Disposable nappy - 75 years
- \* Beer can - 200-500 years
- \* Glass bottles and jars - Never

## More waste facts

- \* Every year the average Australian family produces enough rubbish to fill a three-bedroom house, producing about 2.25 kg of waste each per day. (1)
- \* Worldwide, nearly 3 millions tonnes of plastic are used to bottle water every year. (2)
- \* Overall Australians threw away \$2.9 billion of fresh food, \$630 million of uneaten take-away food, \$876 million of leftovers, \$596 million of unfinished drinks and \$241 million of frozen food, a total of \$5.3 billion on all forms of food in 2004. This represents more than 13 times the \$386 million donated by Australian households to overseas aid agencies in 2003. (3)
- \* It is estimated that 45 billion pairs of disposable chopsticks are used each year in China. (4)
- \* Australians produce an estimated 140,000 tonnes of e-waste each year but only about 4% is recycled. (5)
- \* Australia is one of the highest producers of waste per head of population in the world. In 1999, Australia ranked second, behind the USA, in terms of domestic waste generation. (6)
- \* It is estimated that over 13,000 pieces of plastic litter are floating on every square kilometre of ocean surface. (7)

For more information on how you can help our environment, or to make some suggestions of your own, please go to [www.coolaustralia.org](http://www.coolaustralia.org)



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## What can you do?

Instead of putting it in or near the bin and hoping for the best, have a look at our [tips for Refusing, Reducing, Reusing and Recycling](#).

## Refuse

\* This is a simple one - put a "No Junk Mail" sticker on your letterbox and you'll reduce the amount of paper that goes to waste each year. Easy.

\* Producing and delivering a litre of bottled water can emit hundreds of times more greenhouse gases than a litre of tap water. Solution? [Stop buying plastic water bottles](#). Take your own refillable plastic bottle and go back to the tap.

\* [Don't bring anymore plastic #3, vinyl or PVC into to your life](#). PVC, or polyvinyl chloride, creates dioxins during manufacturing, use and disposal. Dioxins are known carcinogens that can also disrupt hormonal systems and may cause reproductive and immune system damage. Oooh, yuck.

\* [Refuse plastic bags](#). Each plastic bag can take hundreds of years to break down, and they usually end up in landfill or our oceans, contributing to the deaths of marine creatures. If you leave a calico bag in your car or backpack, the next time you have to pick up bread and milk you won't need a plastic bag. The turtles will love you for it!

## Reduce

\* [Avoid waste as much as possible](#), starting by using everything you own until it is completely unusable, finished or broken. Then when going to replace it, ask yourself; "Do I Really Need It?" If yes, is there an environmentally friendly alternative? Or can you buy it second-hand or can you borrow it from someone who already has one? The best solution to waste is to avoid it in the first place.

\* [Buy vintage everything](#). From electronics to furniture to fashion, vintage is the most eco-friendly choice you can make.

\* [Use a ballpoint pen that takes refills](#), or a fountain pen with a refillable cartridge.

\* [Take your own mug](#) to places where tea/coffee is served in disposable cups (school functions, theatre nights, conferences, work etc.).

\* [Repair clothing](#), appliances and toys, rather than buy new ones.



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## Reuse

- \* **Reuse small plastic bags** for small purchases.
- \* **Keep a few used plastic shopping bags or cardboard boxes in the car** for shopping on the way home from work or an outing. Keep a spare plastic shopping bag (rolled up and secured with a rubber band) in your handbag or wallet – for those times when you thought you wouldn't need a bag, but did.
- \* **Have a garage sale** instead of dumping items at the tip.
- \* **Use your green waste.** On average 50% of rubbish sent to landfill is food and garden waste. Invest in a worm farm or a compost bin and turn your food and green waste into something glorious. Well, perhaps 'glorious' is taking it a bit too far the mulch you create will have a glorious effect on your garden.



## Recycle

- \* **Recycle empty glass bottles and jars,** plastic bottles, aluminium cans, and steel cans.
- \* If you are on an outing or a holiday where there is no recycling bin, **take your bottles and cans home for recycling.**
- \* Give old **clothes, toys, furniture and appliances** to charity.
- \* **Save your corks from wine and champagne bottles.** Girl Guides National Cork Recycling Program - a range of businesses collect corks on behalf of the Guides ([www.guidesaus.org.au](http://www.guidesaus.org.au)) including The Body Shop stores.
- \* **Mobile Phones:** Take them to any major mobile phone retailer (Telstra, Optus, Vodafone, Dick Smith, Harvey Norman, Virgin Mobile etc). For more information, visit: [www.mobilemuster.com](http://www.mobilemuster.com)
- \* **Printer cartridges:** Look for the "Cartridges 4 Planet Ark" boxes at your local Australia Post, Harvey Norman store, Officeworks, Dick Smith or Tandy or visit Planet Ark: [www.planetark.com](http://www.planetark.com)
- \* **Computers and printers:** There are numerous companies and charities that resell or recycle computers.
- \* **If you are renovating,** ask your trades person to resell or reuse items.

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## References:

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2. G Magazine, 2010, By the numbers, May/June 2010.
3. Hamilton, C., Denniss, R. and Baker, D., 2005, Wasteful Consumption in Australia, The Australia Institute, March 2005.
4. Ha, Tanya, 2009, Green Stuff for Kids, Melbourne University Press, Victoria, Australia.
5. Sustainability Matters, 2008, Automated e-waste recycling plant, <http://www.sustainabilitymatters.net.au/articles/27783-Automated-e-waste-recycling-plant>
6. Australia State of the Environment Committee, 2001, Australia State of the Environment 2001 – Independent Report to the Commonwealth Minister for the Environment and Heritage, CSIRO Publishing.
7. United Nations Environment Program, 2010, Distribution of Marine Litter, <http://www.unep.org/regionalseas/marinelitter/about/distribution/default.asp>



## Other useful waste links:

Mobile Muster: [www.mobilemuster.com](http://www.mobilemuster.com)

Planek Ark: [www.planetark.com](http://www.planetark.com)

Do Something: [dosomething.net.au](http://dosomething.net.au)

Visit [www.coolaustralia.org](http://www.coolaustralia.org) to find out more about waste and what you can do.

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