

action 10: less waste and increased resource efficiency

Victorians need to become more mindful and innovative in the way we design, manufacture, choose, consume, and discard products and materials. By doing so, we all stand to benefit, through a more sustainable community using its resources more wisely.

We need to seriously rethink how to extend and maximise the life of products and materials with greater emphasis on the entire life cycle – production and consumption and disposal.

What we will do

10.1 Banning plastic bags

We will introduce legislation to ban lightweight plastic bags by large retailers by the end of 2008.

About 1.1 billion lightweight plastic bags which are a symbol of our inefficient use of resources are distributed in Victoria each year. As single use products, which are easily replaced by more durable alternatives, they represent unnecessary consumption of resources.

Around 10 million of these shopping bags become litter that endanger the health of marine wildlife, damage property through clogged drains and machinery and detract from the beauty of our environment.

Giving consumers incentives and stronger choices to “say no to plastic bags” is a way we can all contribute to environmental sustainability – in itself a small action but important in developing a more sustainable culture in Victoria.

Currently Australia’s retailers are working towards voluntary reductions in the use of these lightweight plastic bags.

The results so far, while commendable, are falling below the targets set by the retailers themselves. In the event that voluntary initiatives do not achieve the desired outcome regulations will be developed. In order to support and underpin the efforts of Victorian retailers, we will introduce legislation that prohibits the use of lightweight single-use plastic bags at point of sale unless:

- There is a minimum charge of 10 cents per bag;
- It is a small retail store;
- An exemption applies (eg. for health and safety reasons);
- An accredited phase-out plan is approved by the EPA.

Experience from other places where similar systems have been introduced, show that as consumers, we take much more care about deciding if we need a bag and what we do with it if there is a charge involved.

10.2 Take-back and recycling centres

We will establish 12 ‘byte-back’ and ‘detox’ centres to recycle household chemicals, paints and batteries, TVs, computers and other electronic equipment.

Detox your Home

Chemicals in the home are a problem for the community and difficult to dispose of due to incompatibility with the sewerage system safety and landfills. Sustainability Victoria has been collecting these materials through the Detox your Home program for a decade based on weekend events which are held in each Victorian council on an average of once every 20 months.

As our population grows, the resources allocated to the environment will need to be increased but environmental affairs can be managed, they can be protected, it is a matter of will, policy and resources.

Malcolm Fraser, former Australian Prime Minister

To move towards an improved service at a lower cost, we will provide \$2 million to establish a minimum of four further permanent Detox your Home facilities at transfer stations including locations in Melbourne's eastern and South-Eastern suburbs, Bendigo, Ballarat and Wodonga to provide householders with an easily accessed and convenient disposal point for common domestic chemicals (including paint, motor oil, batteries & gas cylinders).

Byteback

Our changing lifestyles have significant impacts on the types of waste that are currently going into landfill. For example, old electronic equipment is the fastest growing waste stream, with mobile phones replaced every 18 months on average.

Computer monitors and screens contain high lead content while keyboards, printers, scanners and hard drives contain a range of toxic chemicals. Landfill is not an acceptable place to store these hazardous, but potentially useful and valuable, materials – it is essential that we find a new way to handle our old or unused computers in a safe way.

A pilot computer recycling trial in the City of Boroondara, known as 'Byteback', is the first ongoing take-back facility in Australia and collected more than 78 tonnes of equipment in its first four months of operation. Of this 97 per cent has been recovered for recycling and these materials, such as plastics and metals, can be processed into raw materials for use in everyday products.

The Government will provide \$2 million to make the Boroondara centre permanent and to create new centres in conjunction with the computer industry in Melbourne's western, northern and south-eastern suburbs, and in Bendigo, Geelong, Latrobe Valley and the north-east of the state. In some cases these centres will be co-located with existing transfer stations.

10.3 Sustainable production and consumption taskforce

We will convene a Task Force on Sustainable Production and Consumption to draw together key industry and community stakeholders with an interest in product design, manufacture, recovery and disposal.

To develop the business case for sustainable production and consumption – to make it viable and profitable for businesses to build eco-design into their products and services – we will convene a Task Force on Sustainable Production and Consumption.

Towards Zero Waste

The *Towards Zero Waste Strategy*, released by the Government in September 2005, is a call to action for all Victorians to become more mindful and innovative in the way we design, manufacture, choose, consume and discard products and materials.

Towards Zero Waste is guided by three main objectives, to generate less waste, increase the amount of materials for recycling and reprocessing and reduce damage to our environment caused by waste.

By 2014, *Towards Zero Waste* aims to:

- Cut waste generation by 12 per cent - 1.5 million tonnes a year.
- Recover 75 per cent of solid waste (by weight) to be reused, recycled and/or converted to energy (currently 51 per cent).
- Improve 2003 levels of littering by 25 per cent.

Towards Zero Waste takes trends in waste generation, resource recovery and disposal into account, and identifies priority products, materials and industries for action.

This task force will draw together key industry and community stakeholders to develop ideas for practical action and to assist in the policy development process.

The Government will drive these actions through an *Integrated Products Stewardship Framework*, with new initiatives to achieve an integrated approach to product stewardship and products policy, to support businesses, industries and communities to shift to more sustainable production and consumption systems. These initiatives, utilising voluntary partnership, co-regulation and infrastructure provision, will draw together the various strands of the Government's existing policy in the areas of product stewardship, cleaner production, eco-design and extended producer responsibility.

10.4 National packaging covenant

The Government has played a leading role in the national development of a strengthened National Packaging Covenant. The Covenant, in place since 1999, has provided a stimulus to industry to look at the sustainability of packaging, resulting in innovation in packaging design and practice and has assisted local governments to establish their successful kerbside recycling systems. The strengthened Covenant will extend recycling efforts beyond kerbside collections and into businesses, major events and shopping centres, and it includes a national recycling target for packaging of 65 per cent (up from the current 48 per cent) by the end of 2010. As well as continuing to advocate and push for improved management of packaging at a national level, the Government will also explore options for consumer-driven packaging reductions, including possible trials of packaging take-back systems for some industry sectors.

10.5 Litter strategy

The Environment Protection Authority and Sustainability Victoria will develop a new Litter Strategy for Victoria for release and adoption by early 2007.

The Government is currently seeking a 25 per cent improvement in littering behaviour in Victoria which creates the need for a detailed and up to date litter strategy. The strategy will be developed in partnership with the Victorian Litter Action Alliance, local government and the Department of Sustainability and Environment. The strategy will cover enforcement, better education and awareness raising programs and link with the National Packaging Covenant.

10.6 Hazardous waste

We will dramatically reduce Victoria's hazardous waste going to landfill by raising landfill levies from \$30/tonne to \$130/tonne – and put the proceeds back into initiatives to help industry avoid waste and reuse materials.

In 2000, the Government released our *Industrial Waste Management Policy* (Prescribed Industrial Waste) to minimise prescribed industrial waste. Since then, Victoria has reduced the amount of hazardous manufacturing waste from over 122,000 tonnes to about 89,000 in 2005 (a 27 per cent reduction).

Avoidance remains our primary goal, and we have been working closely with industry to achieve this through the EPA's cleaner production program. This has led to some significant savings, including a lead smelter that has reduced the lead in its slag going to landfill by 40 per cent, saving \$40,000 on landfill costs.



By giving the proceeds of increased levies back to industry, we can further cut the amount of hazardous waste going to landfill. This is also an important transitional pricing signal to send to industry to help avoid the high future cost of sending waste to long-term containment.

10.7 Support smart business

We will provide \$2.5 million for the Resource Smart Business Program, to help Victorian businesses be more efficient.

We will provide grants and support to businesses that generate substantial quantities of hazardous and other waste. Building on the existing business innovation initiatives, this program will include support to businesses investing in leading edge eco-efficient solutions in a range of forms including new technologies, systems, processes, and business practices.

Metropolitan Waste Management Group

The Victorian Government has committed to reform Melbourne's solid waste planning and management arrangements. It will establish a new organisation, the Metropolitan Waste Management Group (MWMG), to help deliver improved resource efficiency and to achieve the goals of *Towards Zero Waste*.

The MWMG and a new metropolitan waste and resource recovery strategic plan will play key roles in turning waste into resources.

The MWMG will be a unique partnership between the 30 local governments of the Melbourne metropolitan area and the Victorian Government. It will provide regional coordination and facilitation of waste management and resource recovery services for the metropolitan area. The Victorian Government will support the development and implementation of the strategic plan and the MWMG to develop projects that establish new-generation waste processing facilities to maximise the recovery of valuable resources from household waste and organic material.

The Victorian Government will work with industry associations and businesses to showcase innovative ideas and systems that reduce waste. We will continue to cut red tape for business, reduce regulatory burden, streamline approval processes for leading sustainable projects and businesses and support investment to ensure that sustainable businesses and industries underpin Victoria's economic future.

10.8 Lifecycle management in business and industry

We will provide \$9 million through the EPA to improve the life cycle of products and services in key industries in Victoria.

The EPA will work with the Victorian Economic Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Australian Industry Group and Plastic and Chemicals Industry Association to support improvements across the lifecycle of products and services in key industries. As well as improving the environmental performance and efficiency of companies, reducing hazardous and other waste, this project will be designed to reduce occupational health and safety risk, deliver financial savings and market advantages, develop new product lines, build business reputation, reduce liability and insurance premiums and improve working environments for staff.

10.9 Environmental code of practice for manufacturing

We will develop an Environmental Code of Practice for Manufacturing in partnership with the Australian Industry Group.

This Code will be developed and funded under Australian Industry Group's Sustainability Covenant with the EPA. The Code will help Victorian manufacturers to move "beyond compliance" and generate cost savings through reduced waste and more sustainable resource use. The Code will generate new market opportunities through more efficient manufacturing practices.

10.10 Trade waste

We will set new directions for trade waste through cleaner production and invest \$4 million to support rural food and dairy manufacturers to cut their use of potable water.

The disposal of industrial and commercial waste through the sewerage system is an important waste treatment route for many Victorian industries. On average about 70,000 million litres of trade waste is discharged through the sewer system each year. Unfortunately, this waste is a major source of salt and heavy metals, which prevents more water and biosolids from being recycled.

It is proposed to:

- Establish an independent trade waste standards setting process to enable efficient and effective trade waste improvement plans applicable for each regional urban or metropolitan water authority;
- Develop a state-wide framework for cleaner production involving partnerships between the water industry and their trade waste customers;

- Work with industry peak bodies to build closer co-operation with the water industry, facilitate education, training, and best practice management of trade waste at its source; and
- Explore the merits of establishing a public information resource on trade waste data that will directly support possible water trading in urban water markets.

Building on the Trade Waste Review, we will invest \$4 million to reduce trade waste volumes from Victoria's food and dairy industries and reduce their use of drinking water.

10.11 Detergents

We will drive the national agenda to develop minimum standards for labelling and salt levels in detergents so more water can be recycled.

The amount of salt from detergents in domestic waste-water impacts significantly on how that water can be reused or recycled. Through improved labelling, consumers can be better informed about the detergents they buy and the impact they have on the environment.