

# The Advertiser

OpEd

## Trash no longer treasure

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Recycling was once a revenue raiser but is now a cost, prompting a rethink of how we deal with our rubbish. Science Reporter CLARE PEDDIE reports.

SORTING rubbish from recycling and putting the yellow bin out for collection is a national pastime that could become a thing of the past if the current crisis is not addressed as a matter of urgency, industry leaders say.

While South Australians take great pride in the knowledge we do it better than anyone, with more waste diverted from landfill, thanks in part to our early adoption of container deposit legislation and the plastic bag ban, KESAB executive director John Phillips says we are not immune from the problems emerging interstate.

"It was inevitable that something like this was going to happen," he said. "You can't keep dumping our rubbish on someone else's land, in this case it was China." For years China was hungry for resources and consumed a large proportion of the world's recyclable materials.

Premium plastics HDPE (high-density polyethylene) and PET (polyethylene terephthalate) attracted \$400 to \$450 a tonne, mixed paper and cardboard \$150 to \$200 a tonne and mixed plastics for anywhere between \$50 and \$120 a tonne.

But those markets have suddenly tightened because China wants a higher-quality product. The National Sword action requires paper and cardboard with less than 0.5 per cent contamination, down from 5 per cent. It bans 24 waste-related items and enforces stringent quality standards for imported materials from March 1, 2018.

Industry is reeling. Prices for recycled commodities have plummeted. Our mixed plastics are virtually worthless and some are already off to landfill.

Recycling, once a revenue raiser, is now a cost to councils. Waste management companies are scrambling to renegotiate contracts and councils are clamouring for state government help, to buy time before they start cost shifting to residents by increasing rates.

This week one council in Queensland (Ipswich) gave up entirely and announced it would send recycling straight to landfill.

No-one wants to see that happen here. Mr Philips wants to dip into the State Government's Green Industry Fund, money raised from the Solid Waste Levy, to invest in local recycling solutions and "ultimately continue South Australian leadership in this area".

"It's an opportunity for South Australia on a scale of economy," he said. "Look for technology, innovation and build something at the local level, we're going to have to do it sooner or later, why aren't we thinking about it now?" He says the Waste Levy has generated a considerable amount of money, with more than \$100 million up for grabs.

The Levy is set to rise again on July 1 from \$87 a tonne to \$100 a tonne in the metropolitan area.

This week Treasurer Rob Lucas established a working group to investigate the impacts of the ban.

He said the Government would review the group's findings before making any decision on a relief package.

The Waste Management Association has offered solutions for the short, medium and long term (12 months and beyond), including "research and development to identify and build markets for recovered material in Australia, and new ... technology".

In a letter to SA Environment Minister David Spiers, Association chief executive Gayle Sloan and SA president Mark Rawson warned: "There is a currently a real risk that kerbside recyclables could be sent to landfill due to frustration of contracts as a result of the fundamental shift of commodity pricing".

Recyclers of South Australia Inc. chief executive John Lester says dumping is rife .

"Non-deposit plastic is a big problem," he said. "Our recyclers can't get rid of mixed plastics since China stopped taking it. They have to dump it." No-one seems willing or able to lift their standards and meet China's needs. The contents of our yellow bins are simply too dirty or mixed up with non-recyclable, unwanted material. Cleaning it or sorting it seems too labour-intensive to be cost-effective.

Green Industries SA, formerly Zero Waste SA, says industry sources typically report 10 to 15 per cent contamination.

But the situation is still better here than interstate, especially at recycling depots.

"In terms of recycling we really do have better results," the spokesman said. "Our Container Deposit Scheme provides a very clean material with minimal contamination, as so many of our beverage containers are dropped off at depots for the 10 cent deposit. Glass sorted by colour ... and cleaner plastics and aluminium cans consistently materials retain a high market price.

"We also have state of the art glass recycling and manufacturing plants right here in Adelaide so most of the glass is put back into bottles especially for the wine industry." But large volumes of plastics and paper had been going overseas and interstate. "We have industries here in Australia that can use most of the material we produce," the spokesman said. "However, they weren't prepared to pay the prices offered by China." Rubbish collection agency East Waste general manager Rob Gregory is keen to help educate the public. "The key is that the community continue to recycle," he said.

Here are the top 10 items we need to keep out of our yellow lidded recycling bins: 1 PLASTIC BAGS We hate to be a nag, but please don't place your recycling in a bag! Bagged recycling cannot be sorted and often goes to waste. Set it free so it can be recycled easily. Plastic bags and other soft plastic wrapping causes problems by getting caught in the paper stream as well as wrapping around machinery at the recycling facility. So please leave plastic bags and soft plastics out.

Plastic bags and other soft plastics can be placed in the REDcycle bins found at Coles and Woolworths. The soft plastics are recycled and made into outdoor furniture, bollards and board walks for schools and councils.

2 E-WASTE Kerbside bins are not the place to recycle or place your electronic waste! Electronic items must be taken to a specialised E-waste recycling centre. Please contact East Waste or your council for your electronic recycling options.

3 TEXTILES No clothes please — or textiles/fabric in the recycling bin! Clothing and fabric cannot be recycled in the yellow lidded recycling bin. Please take good quality clothing to a charity store.

Old and worn out clothing can be used as rags or placed in the general waste to landfill bin.

4 FOOD AND LIQUID Food and drinks don't go down well in the recycling bin! Food and liquids cause a mess and can contaminate a whole load of recyclable items, which may mean they end up in landfill.

Please make sure containers and bottles are empty before placing them in the recycling bin. Place unwanted food in the green lidded 'food and garden organics' bin.

5 POLYSTYRENE/FOAM Make your recycling bin a 'No Foam Zone!' Expanded polystyrene foam includes meat trays, coffee cups and foam packaging. Polystyrene contaminates recyclable materials as it breaks up into many small pieces when placed in the recycling bin. Due to its light weight, it also gets caught up in the paper/cardboard stream.

6 TOUGHENED GLASS Not all glass is created equal and therefore it's not all recyclable. This includes pyrex, cook wear, glass lids, crockery, mirrors and window glass. Toughened and heat proof glass has a very high melting point and therefore cannot be recycled like glass bottles and jars can.

7 SHREDDED PAPER Beware of the dreaded shredded paper! Although whole sheets of paper can be recycled, shredded paper is too small to sort and recycle. The pieces fall through the cracks of the sorting

machines, stick to the belts, contaminate glass and plastic materials and end up everywhere. Please place shredded paper (loose — not in a bag) in your green lidded 'food and garden organics' bin instead.

8 NAPPIES Finding a dirty nappy in the recycling bin doesn't make anyone happy! Nappies cannot be recycled. Please only place them in the general waste to landfill bin.

9 WET PAINT Make sure your recycling bin isn't tainted with wet paint! Please only place empty and dry paint tins in the recycling bin. Wet paint can be first dried then scraped into your waste bin before placing the empty paint tin in the recycling bin.

10 BRICKS and WIRE Bricks, building materials and wire are other items we don't desire! Heavy materials such as bricks, tiles and scrap metal damage trucks and machinery. Wire, coat hangers, hoses and strapping get caught and wrap around machinery, stopping the machines from working and causing damage. Source: EastWaste

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