Steel and Aluminium

Although Australians claim to be aware of the many benefits of recycling, our recycling rates remain low, with only 41% of the 1.7 billion steel cans bought annually being recycled.[5] This may be because many people are not aware of just how many steel products can be recycled.

Did you know?

- *Producing 20 aluminium cans from recycled materials uses the same amount of energy as making one can from raw materials.*[1]
- *By recycling one aluminium can you are saving enough energy to run your television for three hours.*[1]
- *So much electricity is needed for aluminium production, that smelting plants (factories that make aluminium) need their own power generators.*[1]
- *Recycling steel cans saves 87% of the energy it takes to make the cans from raw materials.*[5]
- *On 2005 Clean Up Australia Day, metal and aluminium rubbish accounted for about 12% of all the rubbish collected.*
- *Recycled steel is manufactured into many things, including cars, planes, train tracks and tools.*[1]
- *In Australia, the average person uses about six kilograms of steel cans every year and recycles only 2.4 kilograms.*[5]

Minimising environmental impact

A great deal of energy is used to manufacture raw steel and aluminium. This energy not only creates emission of greenhouse gasses it also exhausts our natural resources. However, it takes far less energy and natural resources to manufacture recycled steel and aluminium products. So every steel or aluminium can that you recycle helps to minimise harm to the environment.

Aluminium cans are Australia's most recycled beverage container, with about 70% of all used cans being recycled. However only 41% of the 1.7 billion steel cans bought annually are recycled.[5]

In fact, each year, each Australians send around 3.5 kilograms of steel cans to landfill. That's enough steel to make 40, 000 fridges.[5]

This may be because many people are not aware of how many steel products can be recycled. The test – if a magnet can stick to something it can be recycled!

Contact your local council for details on exactly what steel and aluminium products are accepted through the kerbside recycling program in your area.

Aluminium Recycling

Aluminium soft drink cans, beer cans and aluminium cooking foil can all be recycled.

Rinse and crush aluminium cans before putting them out for recycling. To conserve water, rinse cans in used dishwater or in a bucket with other recyclables. If you collect cans from public places to sell at buy back centres, be sure to check that no sharp objects, such as syringes, have been placed inside the can before crushing.

Steel Recycling

Steel cans that can be recycled include: food cans, pet food cans, coffee tins, oil cans, aerosol cans, bottle tops and jar lids.

To prepare recyclables, remove any plastic caps from aerosol cans and wash out all cans and tins in used dishwater. Place any steel lids inside cans and squeeze the can at the top to save space and to stop lids and bottle tops from falling out.

Paint cans are also recyclable but any left over paint or varnish should be disposed of carefully. For details please contact Clean Up Australia.

Benefits of Recycling

By making products from recycled materials instead of virgin materials, we conserve land, reduce energy use and lessen the need to drill for oil and dig for minerals.

The benefits of recycling

Recycling is the process by which waste materials are diverted from the waste stream. The products are sorted and then used to produce new materials.

There are environmental, economic and social advantages to recycling.

- Conserving valuable natural resources and raw materials
- Reducing the need to drill for oil and dig for minerals decreases damage to wilderness areas.
- Generating civic pride and environmental awareness.
- Preventing pollution. In most cases, making products from recycled materials creates less air and water pollution.
- Making products from recycled ingredients often uses much less energy than producing the same product from raw materials.
- Saving landfill space. When the materials that you recycle are used to make new products, they don't go into landfills, so space is conserved.

Minimising greenhouse gases

When oil, gas and coal are used in production they emit dangerous greenhouse gases. Every recycled item saves energy that would normally be used in mining, harvesting, manufacturing and transporting. Recycling aluminium saves millions of tonnes of greenhouse gasses. [1]

When steel and aluminium is not recycled, it ends up in landfill. Landfills generate toxic emissions such as carbon dioxide and methane. These greenhouse gases contribute to worldwide climate change. Climate change is already impacting on all our lives, especially in the areas of agriculture and human health.

Saving landfill space

Recyclable material makes up almost 80% of total household waste in Australia, so every item recycled is one less to be buried in landfill.[1] At current rates of waste disposal, it is expected that NSW will reach its present landfill capacity by 2007. [3]

Conserving natural resources

Each steel and aluminium can recycled keeps valuable non-renewable resources such as bauxite in the ground. [1] Because recycled steel and aluminium take less energy to manufacture than virgin materials, finite natural resources such as oil are also conserved.

References

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