

MEDIA RELEASE

Banning Ewaste from Landfill – Is Victoria Ready?

Melbourne, 27 May 2019 – With just over a month to go, the Victorian Government is introducing a ban on ewaste in any bin or landfill site from 1 July 2019. This includes all products with a plug or battery, and means that local councils, businesses and consumers will have to ensure that used, broken or obsolete goods are reused or recycled.

It is estimated that Victoria generated 105,000 tonnes of ewaste in 2015, which equates to more than 18 kg per person. Over 55% of that ewaste is still going to landfill.ⁱ

Victoria will become the third jurisdiction in Australia to ban ewaste from landfill, following in the footsteps of the ACT and South Australia, and moves are currently underway to push for an ewaste landfill ban in Western Australian.

There is growing acknowledgement by governments and the community, that potentially hazardous substances that can be found in ewaste eg. Lead, Mercury, Cadmium and Brominated Flame Retardants, must be safely recovered and managed. This builds on the need to recover and responsibly recycle the materials found in ewaste.

Communities and governments are also looking more and more to manufacturers and retailers of electrical and electronic goods to step-up and provide consumer-friendly options that enable reuse and repair rather than premature disposal.

Ewaste Watch director and co-founder, Rose Read, notes that there are multiple benefits with banning ewaste from landfill.

“Ewaste landfill bans not only increase recovery and recycling rates; they also serve to educate the community about consumption and how we can reuse and recycle electronics.

“While many of the materials found in ewaste are recyclable, they are also a finite resource, and some are quite scarce. This means we have to also slow the rate of use of these materials by maximising the functional life electrical and electronic goods, and increasing their durability.”

“Keeping ewaste out of bins and landfills also helps reduce the growing incidence of fires caused by batteries often found in ewaste. It will help reduce the contamination of other recyclable waste streams as well.”

So how prepared is Victoria to realise the benefits of a landfill ban?

Efforts have been made by the State Government to increase the number of convenient drop-off locations for collecting ewaste to complement existing industry-funded schemes like MobileMuster, Cartridges for Planet Ark and the National Television and Computer Recycling Scheme. But are communities and businesses sufficiently aware of these collection points?

Some critical questions that need wider exposure and much more discussion include:

- Will householders and businesses have to pay for the recycling of their old electrical and electronic products?
- Are batteries accepted?
- What controls are in place to ensure they are recycled properly, and what will happen to any data left on some electronic items?
- Can householders and businesses take their electrical and electronic goods back to the manufacturers and retailers for repair or free recycling?

Finally, will local councils who are left to implement the landfill ban, be able to field the many questions and provide collection services that meet the expectations of residents and businesses? If not, there is a real risk we may see an increase in illegal dumping, problematic stockpiling and general non-compliance with the ban.

John Gertsakis, director and cofounder of Ewaste Watch believes that the landfill ban is only one part of the solution and that the Federal Government must as a matter of urgency, expand the National Television and Computer Recycling Scheme to include all electronic and electrical products not covered by an industry product stewardship scheme.

“The Victorian ban is a important first step, but local councils need much more support to make the ban environmentally beneficial and socially acceptable. Councils need the support of manufacturers, brands and retailers to ensure recycling is free and that community-friendly options are provided for electronics reuse, repair and recycling” notes John Gertsakis.

“The Federal Coalition in its election promises committed \$20m to product stewardship. Its priority should be to implement regulated schemes for all ewaste including batteries, under the Product Stewardship Act where effective voluntary schemes do not exist” said John Gertsakis

“The ultimate success of the ban will only be realised if we have complementary industry funded systems and infrastructure to recover, reuse, repair, refurbish or recycle unwanted electronics.”

The Victorian ewaste ban is a great opportunity to adjust consumer behavior, build a circular economy and provide a clear signal to the electronics and battery industries to produce more durable and sustainable goods.

Evaluation and assessment of the ban will be key to understanding its impact and outcomes, including who ultimately foots the bill of the ban and whether or not there are tangible resource recovery benefits associated with the state-wide prohibition.

If the ewaste to landfill ban helps to empower the community to buy less, choose well and make it last, then we can say it’s making a genuine long-term contribution as we shift to circular solutions and sustainable consumption patterns.

More information about the Victorian Government’s landfill ban can be found here:
www.ewaste.vic.gov.au

What can individuals and businesses do to help avoid and reduce ewaste?

1. **Avoid generating ewaste in the first place**
Buy less, choose well and make it last.
2. **Use tool and appliance libraries where available**
Share, borrow and lease electrical and electronic products rather than purchasing them.
3. **Always ask about warranties and repair options**
Check brand and retailer commitment when buying new products and find out what they offer with regard to repair and replacement options.
4. **Make use of repair cafes**
Join local DIY electronics repair groups and make use of online resources such as [iFixit](#).
5. **Preventative maintenance**
Looking after your electrical and electronic products is key to making products last longer and keeping them out of landfill i.e. regularly check and service larger appliances as a way of maximising their longevity.
6. **Local council reuse and recycling options**
Check the waste and recycling pages on your local council's website to see what reuse and recycling services they provide.
7. **Find your nearest ewaste collection point**
Sustainability Victoria - www.ewaste.vic.gov.au
RecyclingNearYou - www.recyclingnearyou.com.au
National Television and Computer Scheme –
<https://www.environment.gov.au/protection/waste-resource-recovery/television-and-computer-recycling-scheme>
MobileMuster - www.mobilemuster.com.au

Media comment:

John Gertsakis, Director and Co-founder

Ewaste Watch Institute

Mobile: 0409 422 089 Email: john@ewastewatch.com.au

About Ewaste Watch

The Ewaste Watch Institute is a not-for-profit organisation focused on accelerating electronics sustainability and environmental stewardship in Australia. Co-founded by John Gertsakis and Rose Read, the Ewaste Watch mission is to inform, educate, engage and activate industry, government and the public on improved product design, cleaner production, smarter logistics and socially desirable consumption models, such as the sharing economy, reuse, repair and materials recycling. Our vision is a circular electronics industry that is restorative and regenerative, and acts in the public interest to protect human health and the environment. Ewaste Watch collaborates closely with its research partner, the Institute for Sustainable Futures at the University of Technology Sydney.

Additional quotes to be attributed to Ewaste Watch:

“Ewaste Watch is calling on the Federal Environment Minister to expand the National Television and Computer Recycling Scheme to include all products with a plug or a battery and ensure that end-of-life electronics are diverted from landfill and responsibly recycled. This should include all consumer electronics products, Internet of Things devices, and photovoltaic panels, inverters and energy storage systems.”

“As a matter of urgency, Ewaste Watch is calling on the Federal Environment Minister to create regulated national recycling schemes for all batteries under the Commonwealth Product Stewardship Act.”

Key statistics

- Australians are the fourth highest generators of ewaste per capita in the world generating just over 23.6 kg per inhabitant or 574,000 tonnes per annumⁱⁱ. We are also great hoarders of ewaste with more than 25 million mobile phones lying idle in homesⁱⁱⁱ.
- On average we import around 100,000 tonnes of televisions, computers, printers and computer accessories a year^{iv}. That is about 35 million pieces of electronic equipment per annum^v. Plus, we also import at least 9.3 million new mobile phones each year^{vi}.
- The numbers are even more staggering when you consider that the world generated 44.7 million metric tonnes (Mt) of e-waste in a year, yet only 20 percent was recycled through appropriate channels^{vii}.
- It is estimated that Victoria generated 105,000 tonnes of ewaste in 2015. That is more than 18 kg per person. Over 55% of that ewaste is still going to landfill. Data sourced 23/5/2019 from https://www.environment.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0026/408347/Managing-g-e-waste-in-Victoria-PIA-PDF.pdf
- Less than 10% of ewaste generated in Victoria is collected through the National Television and Recycling Scheme. Derived from Approved Co-regulatory Arrangement Annual Reports as published on <http://www.environment.gov.au/protection/waste-resource-recovery/publications#research-ewaste>

Endnotes

ⁱ Data sourced 23/5/2019
from: https://www.environment.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0026/408347/Managing-e-waste-in-Victoria-PIA-PDF.pdf

ⁱⁱ Baldé, C.P., Forti V., Gray, V., Kuehr, R., Stegmann, P. : The Global E-waste Monitor – 2017, United Nations University (UNU), International Telecommunication Union (ITU) & International Solid Waste Association (ISWA), Bonn/Geneva/Vienna.

ⁱⁱⁱ MobileMuster Annual Report 2018

^{iv} Review of the Product Stewardship Act 2011, including the National Television and Computer Recycling Scheme Consultation paper March 2018

^v Review of the Product Stewardship Act 2011, including the National Television and Computer Recycling Scheme Consultation paper March 2018

^{vi} MobileMuster Annual Report 2018 - Appendix

^{vii} Baldé, C.P., Forti V., Gray, V., Kuehr, R., Stegmann, P. : The Global E-waste Monitor – 2017, United Nations University (UNU), International Telecommunication Union (ITU) & International Solid Waste Association (ISWA), Bonn/Geneva/Vienna.