



Australian Packaging Covenant

Australia's environment ministers agreed to a new national policy on waste and resource management in November 2009—the first since 1992. The *National Waste Policy: Less Waste, More Resources* sets the agenda for waste and resource recovery in Australia over the next 10 years, and includes measures to monitor and address packaging waste. But industry and government have been working together since 1992 to address waste packaging issues.

In November 2009, the Environment Protection and Heritage Council enforced, in principle, the new Australian Packaging Covenant. The new Covenant is the third iteration of an agreement between Australian governments and industry. Currently known as the National Packaging Covenant, the proposed new agreement shifts the focus of work to respond to a changing waste environment. Unlike earlier covenants, this third covenant is a living document and will be reviewed regularly over time.

The Covenant is a unique, world-leading model for the management of packaging, which will evolve to meet the changing environment in which we work and play.

The first Covenant focused on building kerbside recycling services nationally. The focus of the current Covenant has been on building recycling infrastructure. The proposed new Covenant will focus on improving packaging design, decreasing litter and increasing levels of recycling at work and in public places.

HOW IT WORKS

There are currently 786 signatories representing approximately 90 per cent of the packaging produced in Australia and 80 per cent of packaged retail brands. Signatories include manufacturers, distributors and retailers of food, beverages, paint, computers, hardware, pharmaceuticals, personal care, stationery, packaging and whitegoods.

Industry, governments and community groups sign and commit to reducing the environmental impact of packaging. Signing is voluntary, but brand owners who do not sign may face government regulations to ensure signatories are not disadvantaged for doing the right thing by the environment.

To date, the Covenant has committed over \$23 million to improve recycling facilities in Australia and leveraged a further \$57 million of additional funding.

In the period from 2003 to 2008 the recycling rate increased from 39 per cent to 57 per cent. That equates to a saving of 1.6 million tonnes of CO₂ and 20,060 Olympic pools of water, and 385,000 fewer cars on the road.

Signatories are choosing more sustainable practices, examining the lifecycle of packaged products from design and manufacture, through transport and storage, to disposal. For example, some signatories have chosen to replace waxed paper boxes for fruit and vegetables with reusable crates. Other signatories have chosen to make their packaging out of recycled materials.

FURTHER INFORMATION

The National Waste Policy and the National Waste Report are available from:

- www.ephc.gov.au
- www.environment.gov.au/settlements/waste/index.html