

Why should we recycle batteries?

1. To recover non-renewable resources

Batteries contain non-renewable metals such as lead, cadmium, nickel, steel, zinc, silver and manganese. Nickel metal hydride batteries also contain rare earth elements. Disposal of used batteries to landfill is not an acceptable processing option under the Australian standard for electronic waste recycling (AS/NZS 5377:2013).

2. To provide a safe solution for used batteries

Lithium batteries can explode or catch fire in landfill if they are damaged or become over-heated. Button cells, which are used in toys and many everyday household products, are extremely dangerous if swallowed by children. Battery recycling offers a safe and environmentally responsible solution for end of life batteries.

3. To remove toxic waste from landfill

Certain types of batteries contain toxic heavy metals such as lead, cadmium and mercury. Most button cells and some alkaline batteries (older, imported and/or counterfeit) contain mercury. Many power tool batteries contain cadmium, and lead acid batteries are used in remote control toys and back-up power batteries. As batteries start to break down in landfill these heavy metals can leach into surface and groundwater. This is a concern because 15% of large landfills and 65% of medium sized landfills in Australia are unlined¹. The best way to recover the most toxic batteries at end of life is to provide consumers with a simple and convenient 'all battery' collection program. The federal Department of Environment classifies all used batteries as hazardous and they require an export permit under the *Hazardous Waste Act*.

4. To facilitate recovery of organic waste

In many parts of Australia landfill is being replaced by alternative waste technologies (AWTs) that recover food and green waste. For example, many councils in Sydney send their waste to AWTs operated by SITA Australia and Global Renewables. Hazardous wastes such as batteries must be removed from waste to facilitate recovery of organic material into quality end products such as compost and soil conditioner. The diversion of organic material from landfill is essential to achieve 'zero waste' goals in jurisdictions such as South Australia and the ACT.

5. To meet community demand for recycling

In a recent survey², 77% of consumers agreed with the statement that it is important to recycle used batteries rather than dispose of them with general rubbish. Where schemes are available, for example through ALDI, Battery World and Batteryback, the amounts being collected are increasing. Planet Ark's 'Recycling Near You' website allows visitors to search for recycling options for a wide range of products and materials. In the year to March 2014 there were 181,000 queries about battery recycling; 62% more than for a similar period in 2010.

¹ DEWHA and EPHC (2010). *National waste report*, Canberra, Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts (DEWHA) and Environment Protection and Heritage Council (EPHC).

² Research conducted by Ipsos, January 2014. Commissioned by the Battery Implementation Working Group in collaboration with the Australian Mobile Telecommunications Association (MobileMuster).