

# Packaging fact sheet

## About packaging

Once upon a time all the food and goods that we used came to us just as they are. Food may have been wrapped in a bit of paper but mainly it came just as it is; apples came in bushels (wooden bucket), bread came as a bare loaf, and milk came in a container that you took to the dairy. Other things like clothes and shoes and furniture and tools were just handed to you in exchange for money.

Now of course, things are a little different. Apples come in plastic bags or tubs, bread usually comes wrapped in a plastic bag, and milk comes in plastic bottles or cardboard cartons. And just about every other thing that we eat, drink or use comes in some sort of plastic, cardboard, paper or glass packaging.



## Why we need packaging

We're very grateful for this packaging: the basic requirement of packaging is that it keeps the contents of the packaging safe, and in the case of food or drinks, prevents it from contamination. This means we're a lot less likely to catch some nasty food bug when tucking into breakfast.

But safety isn't the only requirement of packaging; it has a range of requirements, some necessary and others - like marketing and excessive packaging - add no real value to the product. Essentially, packaging should:

- Keep edible contents safe from contamination;
- Keep contents safe during transport and while in shops;
- Be easy to stack in cartons, boxes etc. for transport;
- Be easy to stacks and display on shelves;
- Be easy to fill with product;
- Be convenient to open, but some products e.g. pills, must be sealed so they can't be interfered with;
- Be cheap to produce;
- Require a label so the people handling the product - including the consumer - know what is inside the packaging;
- Be light in weight;
- Be be suitable for chilling where necessary; and
- Be be suitable for freezing where necessary.

For more information on how you can help our environment, or to make some suggestions of your own, please go to [www.coolaustralia.org](http://www.coolaustralia.org)

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It is obvious from this list that no one form of packaging could meet all these requirements. For example, a glass jar wouldn't be very convenient for packaging a loaf of bread. Likewise, a large plastic bag wouldn't work very well as yoghurt packaging. That is why there is a range of packaging materials and a range of packaging designs.

## The problem with packaging

The problem with packaging arises when we look at what happens to the packaging when it is removed and discarded. There are plenty of examples of packaging that can be recycled, but there are also plenty of examples of packaging that hasn't been designed to be recycled. The only way to treat these types of packaging is to send them to landfill. This is a problem in several ways: it is a waste of the valuable resources that have been used to make the packaging; it is a waste of the energy used to create the packaging; and it is another burden for our environment.

## How to avoid packaging waste

- Where possible, choose items with little or no packaging. How? Take your own bag (or bushel) when buying apples and other fruit and veg.
- Where possible, pick items with packaging that can be recycled. How? Look for packaging such as paper, cardboard and glass, and make sure you're picking plastics that feature a recycling logo.
- Where possible, choose goods from companies that use responsible forms of packaging and avoid the ones that don't.
- If you see some packaging that you think is way over the top, consider dropping an email to that company and ask them to explain why they use so much packaging?



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## Other packaging facts

Australian packaging recycling rates for 2012 (from the [Australian Packaging Covenant](#)):

- The overall recycling rate across Australia increased overall from the 2003 baseline of 39.2% to 63.8% in 2012.
- The amount of waste going to landfill has reduced from 2.537 million tonnes in 2003 to 1.596 million tonnes in 2012.
- 67.3% of aluminium cans were recycled.
- 47.3% of glass packaging was recycled.
- 76.8 % of paperboard packaging was recycled.
- 41.5% of plastic packaging was recycled.
- 38.9% of steel cans were recycled.



Branded litter and packaging facts (from [Keep Australia Beautiful](#)):

- In 2011/12 drink containers and packaging made up the largest proportion of branded litter objects identified around Australia (25.9%).
- Other items identified in the litter study of the same year include:
  - \* Alcoholic beverage containers and packaging -16.2%;
  - \* Take-away food and drink containers and packaging -18.6%; and
  - \* Snack wrappers and packets -16.8%.

## Resources

Australian Packaging Covenant - <http://www.packagingcovenant.org.au/>

Packaging Council of Australia - <http://pca.org.au/site/education/>

Keep Australia Beautiful - <http://kab.org.au/>

Planet Ark - <http://planetark.org/>

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