



## Aerosol Can Recycling

### About Aerosol Cans

Aerosol cans are used to package and dispense a vast array of liquid products – from hair spray and deodorants to cooking oil and whipped cream, and even medicines. Over 14 billion aerosols are produced worldwide every year, with Australians purchasing more 240 million aerosols each year – around 10 for every person.

In a typical aerosol, one fluid stored under high pressure (the propellant) is used to propel another fluid (the product) out of a metal can. Aerosol cans are made from steel and aluminium, both of which can be recycled. They also perform consistently and are leak proof, will not spill, and have a long shelf life, which reduces consumption.

By 1989, ozone depleting CFCs were phased out in all Australian aerosols and replaced with natural hydrocarbons (with the exception of medical products such as asthma inhalers).

Empty aerosols can be safely recycled along with other metal packaging, and more than 90% of Australians have access to aerosol recycling through their kerbside recycling service. Despite this, research commissioned by Planet Ark in 2014 found that well over half of Australians (54%) think that aerosols cannot be placed in their home recycling bin. The three most common reasons that people do not recycle aerosols at home are:

- They've been told that aerosols are not recyclable;
- They incorrectly believe that aerosols will explode in the recycling bin;
- They think that aerosols are not made from recyclable material.

The Australian Packaging Covenant reported that, in 2012-13, 40% of used steel cans (including steel aerosol cans) were recycled, while around 49% of aluminium aerosol cans were recycled. This means that well over half of the aerosol cans used in Australia are going to landfill unnecessarily.

### Recycling Process

The aerosol recycling process begins when we put our empty cans into recycling bins. Empty aerosol and



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other cans are collected from homes and workplaces and taken to a Material Recovery Facility (MRF) where the recycling is sorted into its material types. Magnets are used to collect steel, while aluminium cans are magnetised using a rotating magnet or “eddy” current, which causes the cans to be pushed away from other materials. Once separated, the steel and aluminium cans are pressed into large bales and transported to processing plants where they are melted down and reprocessed into new steel and aluminium stock, ready to be made into new aerosol cans and other products.

## Why Recycle Aerosols?

- **It saves energy** – using recycled aluminium to make aerosol and other cans uses just 5% of the energy required to make one aluminium can from raw materials. Similarly, producing steel from recycled cans uses only a quarter of the energy used to make steel cans from scratch.
- **It reduces greenhouse gases** – recycling 1 tonne of aluminium saves over 20 kilograms of greenhouse gases from entering the atmosphere.
- **It saves resources** – both steel and aluminium are made from non-renewable resources so recycling cans means these resources, as well as other resources like water, can be used for more important purposes. Both aluminium and steel can be infinitely recycled without degrading in quality.
- **It reduces waste going to landfill** – recycling aerosol cans means they do not unnecessarily end up in landfill.

## Take Action

Recycling aerosol cans is simple:

1. Make sure the can is empty;
2. Find out, through [RecyclingNearYou.com.au](http://RecyclingNearYou.com.au) or your council’s website, whether your council collects aerosols (most do);
3. Leave the can intact (do not pierce or squash it), put it in the bin with your other recycling and, if possible, remove any plastic parts like lids.

If the aerosol can isn’t empty, it should be disposed of through your council’s hazardous waste program. Visit [RecyclingNearYou.com.au](http://RecyclingNearYou.com.au) or your council website for further information.



Aerosols can be recycled in most kerbside collections

## Further Information

To find out more about aerosols, including their history, how they work, and environmental information, visit the [Aerosol Association of Australia](http://Aerosol Association of Australia).