
FAQ: Changes to the Materials Recycling Facility at Bibra Lake

About the industry

Q: What are the changes to the recycling industry?

There's been some significant changes in the types of recyclable materials accepted by China, which is the world's largest manufacturer. These changes include a ban on some types of solid waste, including various plastics and unsorted mixed papers, as well as significantly stricter standards for contamination levels.

As a result of the changes, SUEZ is now selling commodities from its Materials Recycling Facility in Bibra Lake into South-East Asian markets, along with the rest of the world. The influx of recyclable materials into these markets from around the world is causing a significant fall in prices and we've recently seen some SE Asian countries ban certain recycled product imports.

Q: Why do we need to export our recyclable materials? Why can't we use it in our local market?

Currently, we don't have the local infrastructure or demand to use most of our recyclable materials but we know this needs to change. SUEZ is working with industry, governments and communities to change behaviours and adapt policies that drive a more sustainable economy. SUEZ is exploring how we can reduce, reuse and recycle waste, from manufacturing to supply, retail, consumption and end-of-life.

Q: Where do we currently export our recyclable materials?

The recycling from the Materials Recycling Facility at Bibra Lake sends:

- Aluminium: To Korea where it's made into aluminium sheets and baking trays
- Paper and cardboard: To paper mills in South East Asia where it's made into new cardboard, containers and tissues
- Plastic: To plastic processors in, Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam where it's used to make containers, garments and mats
- Steel: To steel mills in Indonesia where it's made into mild steel products and ingots
- Glass: Crushed and used locally in WA as road base and construction material

Q: What is being done to address these changes?

Environment Minister Stephen Dawson established a Waste Taskforce to address the export restrictions on recyclable waste and improve WA's recycling performance. As part of the Taskforce, SUEZ is working closely with Waste Authority WA and WA Local Government

Association (WALGA) on education campaigns to help reduce contamination in recyclable materials.

About residents

Q: What are the changes to the yellow-top recycling bin?

We can unfortunately no longer accept the following items in the yellow-lid recycling bin: aerosol cans and soft plastics like plastic bags, cling wrap, bubble wrap, polystyrene and cereal bags.

While some clean soft plastics and aerosols may still be able to be recycled, they are no longer accepted at SUEZ's facility. Soft plastics are now considered a contaminant as they contaminate our clean streams of commodities (newspaper and cardboard), while aerosols are better disposed of through council's Household Hazardous Waste drop-off scheme due to the risk of fires and explosions.

Q: So, what can and can't be recycled in the yellow-lid bin?

YES: Plastic, steel, glass and aluminium containers, paper, cardboard

NO: Plastic bags, food, garden materials, textiles, aerosol cans and batteries

If in doubt, leave it out and contact your local council.

Q: The list of plastics is confusing. What about meat trays and take-away containers?

Generally, due to confusion around what materials meat trays are made from, we'd advise you to avoid putting meat trays into the recycling bin. Clean take-away containers that are made of plastic or paper can be disposed of in the yellow-lid bin.

Q: What should I do with my soft plastics?

You can drop off your soft plastics at Redcycle bins located in major supermarkets such as Coles and Woolworths.

Q: What should I do with my aerosol cans?

Aerosol cans can be disposed free of charge through the Household Hazardous Waste (HHW) Program available at the Henderson Resource Recovery Park (920 Rockingham Rd, Henderson WA 6166) or Millar Road Landfill (Millar Rd W, Baldivis WA 6170).

Q: What happens to unacceptable materials that are placed in the yellow-lid bin?

Materials that shouldn't be in the recycling bin will be taken to landfill. However, we really encourage residents to ensure that only the right materials go into the recycling bin because there's a high risk that incorrect materials will contaminate or ruin good recycling.

Q: Why can't I just put soft plastics and aerosol cans in the rubbish bin then?

We want to help people recycle right and recycle more often. Currently, two-thirds of household waste generated in Perth is being sent straight to landfill – yet a lot of this waste could've been recycled.

But it's not just about recycling. We want households and businesses to become more aware about the importance of reducing and reusing waste to begin with. The planet is our home and we want to do everything we can to make it a safe and enjoyable place for generations to come.

Q: Why can't the council collect our soft plastics and aerosol cans from the Materials Recycling Facility, and recycle the materials directly?

Residential comingled recyclables are all mixed together in yellow-top bins. Recyclables are run through a process line at SUEZ's Materials Recycling Facility to be separated. Despite our best efforts, soft plastics typically end up getting caught in bales of cardboard and newspaper which is now treated as contamination by end-markets. Aerosols contain residual flammable materials and have caused fires and explosions in the past.

Q: There's a lot of conflicting messages about recycling out there. How will you educate people about the changes?

SUEZ is working closely with the local council on educational materials to inform people about the changes.

We are working with WALGA and Waste Authority WA to ensure this new clear and consistent message is communicated broadly. It is in everybody's interests to ensure the ongoing viability of the recycling industry in WA.