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# Buy Recycled Policy Development Guide





## Disclaimer

This document is provided as a general guide only. The use of recycled content in any packaging or product should be assessed by any organisation to ensure performance requirements and safety risks are addressed. The Australian Packaging Covenant (the Covenant) and the Australian Packaging Covenant Organisation (APCO) accept no liability or responsibility for any use of or reliance upon this document by any party.

# Introduction

Under the reporting criteria '*recycled & renewable materials*', Members develop and implement policy to buy products and packaging containing recycled content, where possible. This is intended to help drive the market for recycled packaging materials by creating new customers and 'pull' factors in the market for these materials, and hence improving the economic rationale to recycle.

The term 'buy recycled' is generally self-explanatory, but the way in which your organisation interprets it is likely to be singular and specific. A Buy Recycled policy might be written to apply only to your packaging, or could extend to all purchasing done by your organisation – the way in which you interpret 'buy recycled' and prepare your policy will depend on your business structure and product ranges.

APCO recommends that Members start from the easiest entry point to incorporate recycled content into their packaging, and expand from there. Some organisations may be in a position where they do not actively purchase recycled content products, while others may have an existing sustainable procurement policy within which buying recycled is a single clause, and the challenge is to improve its implementation.

This document is designed to address basic questions and outline the stages in developing and implementing a Buy Recycled policy.

## What is recycled content?

Recycled content is the proportion, by mass, of recycled material in a product or packaging. The Australian/New Zealand Standard ISO 14021:2000 states that only pre-consumer and post-consumer materials are considered to be recycled content; manufacturing wastes such as regrind are excluded from this claim<sup>1</sup>.

Recycled material is defined as material which has been reprocessed from recovered material by means of a manufacturing process, and made into a final product or into a component for incorporation into a product<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> AS/NZS ISO 14021: 2000, *Environmental labels and declarations—Self-declared environmental claims*

<sup>2</sup> AS/NZS ISO 14021: 2000, *Environmental labels and declarations—Self-declared environmental claims*





# Why buy recycled?

There are numerous benefits to buying recycled content products. These include:

- Helping to stimulate demand for recycled materials, leading to improved collection and recovery systems to support this demand;
- Reducing demand on virgin resources;
- Diverting valuable resources from landfill;
- Communicating a clear environmental message to staff, customers and other stakeholders, with associated branding and marketing opportunities; and
- Potential cost savings – some recycled content materials can be more cost effective, particularly in well-developed markets such as fibre products.

# Developing and implementing your policy

Developing and implementing a sound and achievable Buy Recycled policy will involve several key steps. This process will vary between organisations, and this list should not be considered prescriptive; it is intended as a guide only. Your organisation's process will inevitably be tailored to address factors such as the size of your organisation, the products you procure or produce, the industry within which you operate, your location in the supply chain, and any existing procurement policies and/or procedures in place.

Accepting these limitations, Diagram 1 below outlines proposed steps to include when developing your Buy Recycled policy. These are discussed further in the document below.

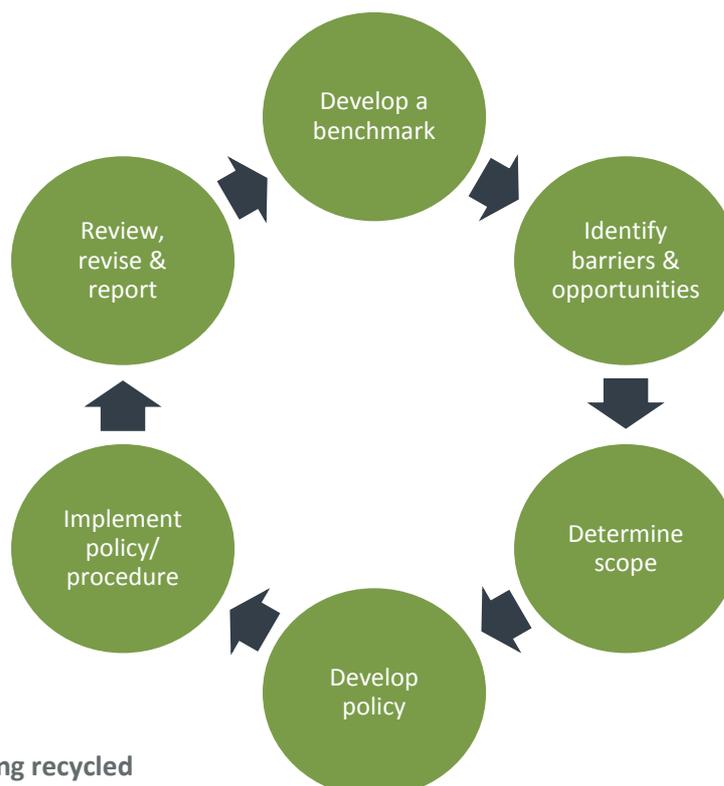


Diagram 1: Steps to buying recycled





# Develop a benchmark

When determining the scope of your Buy Recycled policy, you are likely to find it valuable to first develop an understanding of the products you currently procure and the extent to which they contain recycled content. You may be surprised to find that a significant percentage of those products already contain recycled materials, in which case your policy might emphasise increasing the percentage of recycled content in your purchases.

Examples of packaging items which typically contain recycled content include cardboard cartons, steel and aluminium cans, plastic, and glass containers.

Since you are unlikely to be able to singlehandedly swap all materials used in your packaging supply chain with recycled equivalents, it is important to collaborate with others. You should ask your existing suppliers to identify any existing recycled content in items they supply to you, and whether there are any available alternatives with recycled content.

# Challenges in increasing recycled content

Not all products can be replaced with recycled content equivalents. The most commonly occurring challenges include restrictions around strength or appearance, or a lack of availability; however concern around safety issues, or simple inertia, can often pose as significant a barrier. For this reason, it's important to include as many of your suppliers, and potentially your colleagues, into your decision making and purchasing processes as early as possible, to ensure they understand the rationale for purchasing recycled content items. It's worth keeping in mind that engaged and aware suppliers can be the first to notify you of new developments in recycled materials as they become available.

You should try to be ambitious, but also realistic, when setting your buy recycled targets. Not all products are available with recycled content, and there may be opposition to increasing recycled content in the products you procure. An overview of the some of the key barriers you may encounter is included in **Appendix 2**.

# The scope of your policy

Once your organisation has a better understanding of the amount of recycled content in products you currently procure, you will be better able to define the scope and focus of your Buy Recycled policy and related procedures. The key is to take a balanced approach and ensure all barriers and opportunities are considered.





There are two key areas in which you can implement a Buy Recycled policy within your organisation:

## Operational Use

This includes buying recycled materials and packaging to improve the environmental performance of your products. This might include recycled content:

- for use in preparation of your products for the market;
- for use in the packaging that contains your products; and/or
- for use in distribution transport packaging.

## Organisational Use

This includes buying recycled products for use in the workplace. This might include:

- furniture with recycled components;
- stationery incorporating recycled content;
- IT equipment made from recycled materials; and/or
- recycled glass in driveways & landscaping.

# Developing your policy

The policy you develop will be specific to your organisation and its way of managing policies and processes. If you have an existing procurement policy, your policy development process may consist of inserting a single clause into the existing document. On the other hand, you may need to develop a policy from scratch – we have included a policy template as **Appendix 1** of this document, as an example.

When developing your policy, you could use all of the content in the template provided, or alter it to apply to the specific areas of purchasing appropriate to your organisation. In general, your policy should be developed so as to increase the total recycled content included in the products you currently procure, or, at a minimum, to retain your current recycled content levels if your benchmarks have demonstrated your purchasing is at an appropriate level.

You should make an effort to incorporate input from a range of people within your organisation when developing your policy. This helps to ensure an achievable policy and later buy-in, as well as improving integration of your policy into existing business practices. You should consider involving people from procurement, design and management areas if possible. Suppliers could also be consulted at this point.

Once the policy is developed, make sure that it is endorsed by the CEO or a similar authority, and communicated to all relevant staff and suppliers. You may also wish to make the policy publicly available via the organisation's website or similar.





# Implementation and tracking

Once you have developed your policy, the next challenge will be implementation. If you have developed an initial benchmark, you should consider setting goals for increased recycled content purchasing – this makes it easier to demonstrate achievement over time.

Your goals might be targets to increase the percentage of recycled content in the items you have already identified to contain recycled content, or to move to a percentage of recycled content in all products you purchase, where possible.

One direct method to ensure that recycled content is a consideration when purchasing products is to incorporate statements preferencing recycled content in your tender or request for information documents. This can encourage suppliers to specify the recycled content in your purchases, and/or to make environmentally preferable options available.

Another method you could consider is to develop a review process which questions the recycled content of the products procured on a regular basis. This helps maintain knowledge of the process and can help to track any increases in the recycled content of products.

It's also important to keep track of the results of your Buy Recycled policy, both to ease the process of annual reporting, and also as best practice to demonstrate outcomes over time.

# Reviewing your policy, procedures and progress

Reviewing your policy and its implementation will be a critical component to ensuring your buy recycled process is achieving beneficial outcomes. A review of your policy should aim to identify where it has or has not been successful in altering purchasing patterns, any financial impacts (positive or negative) arising from implementation, product performance and any lifecycle impacts, the extent to which staff are working with suppliers, and any ways in which the process might need to be redirected or altered.

Some of the content included in your review will likely be relevant to the packaging reviews you will be conducting under other reporting criteria. You should ensure that you record any relevant information and use it to identify refinements you may be able to make to your packaging.





# Reporting your progress

Members are required to report on their progress against their APCO goals on an annual basis, so you will need to report against the outcomes of your Buy Recycled policy and its implementation regularly.

## Further Information

For any further questions regarding your organisation's Buy Recycled policy or any other Covenant-related issue, please get in touch with APCO Member Services.





# Appendix 1: Example Buy Recycled Policy

**Policy Name:** [INSERT POLICY NAME]

**Policy Date:** [INSERT DATE]

**Authorisation:** [INSERT NAME AND POSITION]

**Purpose:**

The purpose of this policy is to implement a ‘Buy Recycled’ procurement practice as part of our obligations to the Australian Packaging Covenant and sustainability objectives generally.

**Scope:**

This policy applies to the purchase of **all** [or define specific products or materials] products and/or materials conducted for, or on behalf of [INSERT COMPANY NAME].

**Buy Recycled Policy**

[INSERT COMPANY NAME] will:

1. Purchase products and materials with recycled content wherever deemed practicable and environmentally beneficial;
2. Substitute existing products and materials with recycled content wherever deemed practicable and environmentally beneficial; and
3. Require contractors and suppliers, where practicable and environmentally beneficial, to specify the quantity of recycled materials within the products and/or materials to be supplied.

**Definitions**

*Environmentally beneficial:* Minimise the overall environmental impact based on sound science and a whole-of-lifecycle approach.

*Practicable:* reasonably capable of being accomplished; feasible; meets cost, performance, safety and regulatory requirements.

*Recycled content:* the proportion, by mass, of recycled material in a product or packaging. Only pre-consumer and post-consumer materials are considered to be recycled content (AS/NZS ISO 14021:2000, *Environmental Labels and declarations-Self declared environmental claims*).





# Appendix 2: Barriers to including recycled content

**Availability** – while recycling of all materials is on the increase, not all items are available with recycled content, and there is simply not enough recycled material available to produce all of the products we currently use.

**Cost** – Due in part to availability, the costs of some recycled material can be greater than virgin material.

**Performance** – In some cases, recycled material can lack the performance integrity offered by virgin material. This problem is generally decreasing, while most materials can be tested for strength to ensure they will fulfil your requirements.

**Safety** – As recycled material has been subject to additional processing, it may be unsuitable in products that are in contact with food or for medical products. This concern is typically only relevant for plastics, and there are procedures available to determine if recycled content is appropriate for your proposed use. APCO resource, *Recycled Materials in Food Contact Applications*, contains more information on this topic.

**Environment** – Any decision to choose a recycled product or material should be based on sound science and a whole-of-lifecycle approach, to ensure that the replacement product has an improved environmental impact.



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 Level 4, 332 Kent St, Sydney NSW 2000  
 (02) 8381 3700  
 [apco@packagingcovenant.org.au](mailto:apco@packagingcovenant.org.au)

