

Battle for the backyard impedes resource recovery

Resource recovery is seriously hindered by councils' poor planning practices, writes Anne Prince, CEO of the Australian Council of Recyclers (ACOR).

ACOR is committed to maximising resource recovery and achieving the highest resource value of Australia's secondary of materials. To increase resource recovery, however, there is a pressing need for planning reform that facilitates the establishment of resource recovery facilities and protects investment in them.

State governments across the nation are setting ambitious diversion targets which will result in substantial additional tonnages requiring new and improved technologies and facilities to receive and process these materials. In NSW, for example, the target of 68 per cent diversion from landfill by the year 2014 will require the recovery of an extra two million tonnes of resources.

It is imperative that recovery and reprocessing facilities are located close to generation points to reduce transport costs, but away from residential encroachment. At odds with this are the planning hurdles that must be overcome by the resource recovery sector as it tries to identify sites, gain planning approvals and protect this investment from encroachment.

We believe there is a fundamental lack of understanding by town planners across the country of what we do and how we do it. Too often, resource recovery facilities are put in the same category as 'waste facilities' and subjected to more extreme environmental performance requirements.

Once established, councils do not respect the need to preserve buffer zones around such facilities and allow incursion of more sensitive land uses – to the detriment of the operations of the facility. At worse our members have even had to relocate large pieces of resource recovery infrastructure to overcome this problem, without any financial assistance from the government.

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Scrap metal recycler, Sell and Parker, had been located in Sydney's Waterloo for over 35 years. However, a new multi-story unit development was built overlooking its operation and residents, who had paid a lot of money for their city skyline views, did not want to overlook a scrap yard. The ensuing media pressure

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forced the company to relocate at considerable expense, including acquisition of a new site, delays in planning approvals and costs of relocation.

Similarly, Smorgon Steel Recycling was forced to move from a long-established industrial zone at Chipping Norton, in Sydney's south-west, to Newcastle due to residential encroachment within tradi-



ACOR chief Anne Prince

tional buffer zones. It cost the company over \$15 million.

Some facilities can be moved relatively easily, others cannot, but who is going to pay for poor planning decisions? Perhaps the resource recovery sector needs to add a line onto the balance sheet called future relocation expenses.

Another development is being held up due to a local council not wanting to wake "the neighbours" with a 24-hour operation. But who gave approval for "the residential neighbours" to build on a major arterial road servicing an industrial area in the first place – not the private sector, but government. Some planning decisions just don't get thought through.

In NSW it may be appropriate to relax the guidelines for a "state significant" development to include all developments in the secondary resource recovery industry sector. In this way projects of regional significance can be evaluated on their merits rather than under the "not in my back yard" approach adopted by some councils which have the few remaining suitably zoned and strategically positioned industrial areas.

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