



MEDIA RELEASE

RECYCLING LABELS: 'DOGS BREAKFAST' ACCORDING TO NEW SURVEY

An [independent national audit](#) of recycling information on consumer products and packaging has revealed a situation that is confusing for consumers and does not support better recycling, according to the Australian Council of Recycling (ACOR).

The audit – conducted by sustainability consultancy Equilibrium – across supermarkets, take-away outlets, and convenience stores in two capital cities - found 88% of the packaging components sampled were recyclable through either kerbside recycling or a supermarket-based return program, but that only 40% of these products had a recycling claim present on them.

Additional findings are:

- 55% of imported products and 64% of Australian products sampled displayed a recyclability claim of any kind;
- 23% of products had the Australian Recycling Label (ARL) promoted by the Australian Packaging Covenant Organisation;
- 29% of products had the “Mobius Loop” recycling symbol;
- 29% of plastic products had a resin code symbol which is often mistaken for a recyclability symbol;
- The Tidyman logo appeared on 15% of products sampled, including both recyclable and non-recyclable products, and;
- There was no consistent style, placement, or sizing of recyclable labels.

“The audit shows a dog’s breakfast of consumer information about what products and packaging components are or aren’t recyclable. It’s little wonder that the community regularly says that, while it strongly supports recycling, there’s confusion because of inconsistent, unclear and even misleading logos and claims on the products they buy,” Pete Shmigel, ACOR CEO, said.

“The dog’s breakfast undoubtedly leads to some material going to the wrong place such as recyclables to garbage bins and non-recyclables to recycling bins. That means recycling rates that aren’t as high as they could be, contamination that is too high, and it’s harder to achieve national targets such as 70% plastics recycling (from our current 12%).

“As the peak body for recycling, ACOR fully supports the report’s recommendations, including:

- Labels need to be specific about the management methods of all components, and also include instructions to avoid contamination;

- There needs to be a clear, concise and evidenced-based label placed on every product and packaging type sold into the Australian market;
- The preferred label should be made mandatory and be flexible enough to incorporate new technologies and systems as they come online to recycle more products;
- The “Mobius Loop” could cause consumer confusion, and a short cut to achieving greater clarity and consistency is to remove these and plastic resin codes from packaging, and;
- There is a role for authorities such as the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission in driving and ensuring clarity and consistency in environmental claims and labels pertaining to recycling.

“To make sure that every product that can be recycled is recycled, ACOR believes there needs to be a uniform labelling approach and that there should be a label placed on every product and packaging type sold into the Australian market. If we have such arrangements for nutrition, we can have them for consumer recycling. ACOR will make that case to the Commonwealth Minister for Environment,” Shmigel said.

“Consumers can also be making the direct case to the manufacturers of the products they buy and actively ask company consumer hotlines: what is your approach to recycling labelling?”

“And, those companies who specify products and packaging must also step up to correctly label their products while the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission should ensure accuracy in environmental claims and labels. To that end, ACOR will formally refer the audit report to the ACCC for its consideration and follow up,” Shmigel said.

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