

# MELBOURNE REPORT

## Green bins: Are they rubbishishing our city?

**VINCENT RYAN**  
investigates whether the wheeled wonders will end up burying us under a mountain of rubbish.

**T**HE wheeled juggernauts colonising Melbourne's nature strips are both friend and foe.

Householders simply love the big green rubbish bins. Their 240 litre capacity means they can take all manner of household rubbish ... plus those hard-to-get-rid-of prunings and odd bricks.

Those whose local councils have not introduced the big bins often envy friends who have them in their area.

But their hold-all capacity also makes the 240 litre bins part of a growing rubbish crisis in Melbourne.

Some recycling companies warn that the bins are wrecking efforts to reduce the enormous financial and environmental costs of ever bigger piles of household rubbish. Several Melbourne municipalities are in crisis.

They've just about run out of room to put their garbage.

And, according to some Melburnians, the green bin is destroying efforts to increase recycling and reduce the enormous financial and environmental costs of ever bigger piles of household rubbish.

ACI Glass Packaging is critical of increasing numbers of big green bins.

**T**HE glass giant is worried by the size of the bin and the failure of some councils to introduce an effective recycling program.

The bigger the bin the more rubbish householders will put in it, says ACI.

Privately, some councils using the bins agree.

About 19 of Melbourne's 53 councils have introduced the bins.

Mindful of promises by the State Government to legislate to discourage residents throwing glass away, ACI is keen to highlight anything that could jeopardise its recycling program.

The Environment Protection Authority's assistant director of waste management, Doug Newton, says the ideal — smaller 120 litre bins (one for disposables and one for recyclables) or large bins with two compartments — is a few years away.

Mr Newton estimates most 240 litre bins will need replacing in about five years, though Australia's largest manufacturer says well-maintained bins could be around for 10 to 15 years.

So far, EPA efforts to encourage recycling have been extraordinarily successful.

The EPA has issued a pamphlet on the wheeled wonder bin and a household composting guide.

And about 36 Melbourne councils are operating an EPA-ACI bag scheme for glass, aluminium cans, and black-based plastic bottles, and 13 are planning to this year or in 1990.



**THE GREEN ARMY:** Does it mean Melbourne will have to battle even bigger piles of rubbish?

PICTURE: BRUCE HOWARD

Melburnians' shyness about putting "dead marines" on the nature strip makes them more responsive to discreet EPA/ACI-sponsored bags.

Several more councils have their own recycling ventures and most collect paper.

Nevertheless, ACI's local environmental affairs manager, Alan Rodda, says there are about 100,000 tonnes of glass going into landfill.

If ACI is to meet its recycling requirement, it has to add about 20,000 tonnes to the 130,000 tonnes already being recycled or refilled.

Comalco's recycling man, Mr Bill Kennedy, is less critical of the green bin and says with a 56 per cent recycling rate for aluminium cans, the 60 per cent goal is not far away.

"No matter what rubbish system a council utilises," Mr Kennedy says, "there still has to be a place for recycling."

"To a degree, a big bin system that is not supported by recycling is not appropriate."

**N**UNAWADING resolved its green bin debate by asking residents at the recent council elections whether they wanted one of the bins.

Despite an additional \$50 cost per household and a clear statement that "big bins tend to discourage recycling", more than 51 per cent of residents



**THE RUBBISH PILES UP:** Councils can no longer afford to ignore the need for a comprehensive garbage-collection system.

decided to accept an optional 240-litre-bin system.

With its tips full, Nunawading has been forced to introduce a vigorous recycling program.

Between 1983-84 and 1987-88, paper collections increased by 237 tonnes, cardboard 111 tonnes, metal 31 tonnes, aluminium cans by 28 bales and there were similar increases with car batteries, broken glass and oil.

With enormous transport costs to Nunawading's partly-owned tip 30 km away at Berwick, the council has cause to be concerned about any pos-

sible increase in household garbage.

According to one collector, Peninsula Bottle Depot owner Bob Lorie, Nunawading could however treble its household collections if it used the bag.

Melbourne's model recycling council, Brunswick, has had the green bins for a few years and bags since April 1988.

When it introduced the bins in 1986-87, it had a 12 per cent increase in garbage and 3 per cent in 1987-88.

By last financial year, with a boost to its recycling program, Brunswick achieved a drastic 32 per cent decrease in garbage and saved itself \$22,000.



Otto Australia, the biggest maker of 240 litre bins, is both praised by others for introducing cleaner, more efficient and secure disposal methods and criticised for not pushing the smaller 120 litre bin.

Manufacturing and marketing manager Eric Love says Otto is equally well-equipped to handle 240 or 120 litre bins.

He says there is only about a \$1 difference in price and after exhaustive study, councils opt for the larger bin.

But he is concerned a sudden shift to a smaller bin without a more thorough recycling program could force some people to illegally dump any overflow or

return to backyard incinerators.

Eltham, yet to introduce the bin, has been studying waste disposal options since the early '80s.

A recycling program has the potential, according to Shire engineer John Stamp, of increasing the lifespan of its tip by up to three years.

With the "full" date, 1995, not far away, Eltham residents will need every extra year they can get.

With or without the big green bin, councils can no longer afford to ignore comprehensive recycling.