

Monday, 7 March 2005

Clean Up Australia Day shows urgent action needed on packaging rubbish

Overwhelming amounts of packaging picked up on Clean Up Australia Day show the need for new solutions to reduce the nation's packaging waste problem, according to an Alliance of Australia's leading environment and community groups.

Packaging related items, such as plastic and glass bottles, chip and confectionary packets and plastic bags, were the most common items found on Sunday. In 2004, packaging accounted for 80% of the total rubbish picked up and it appears this will be mirrored in 2005.

"Despite National Packaging Covenant Council claims that they are making progress on the packaging problem, packaging continues to dominate the litter picked up on Clean Up Australia Day," said Ian Kiernan AO, Chairman of Clean Up Australia and a spokesperson for the Boomerang Alliance.

"The only state winning its war on packaging waste is South Australia, where container deposits have removed drink container rubbish from the streets. The results speak for themselves – only 9.6% of the rubbish collected in South Australia last year was beverage containers compared to the national average of 40%.

"Container deposit legislation has operated successfully in South Australia for 30 years and has been implemented in many European countries, Canadian provinces and U.S. states. It's long overdue that other Australian states follow South Australia's lead."

The Boomerang Alliance is calling for environment ministers to make a generational change with packaging and implement initiatives that can genuinely reduce packaging waste.

"For the past five years, the industry self-regulated National Packaging Covenant has had no impact on reducing the growing avalanche of packaging waste choking our natural environment and killing wildlife," said Jeff Angel, Director of Total Environment Centre.

"The admirable efforts of Clean Up Australia Day volunteers are continually undermined by waste management policies that let producers and consumers of packaging avoid any responsibility for the rubbish they create.

"It's time to look at practical ideas such as landfill bans, container deposits, refillable containers and advanced disposal fees that have been successful in reducing packaging waste overseas."

According to the Alliance, an urgent first step is to implement a national Extended Producer Responsibility scheme for packaging, whereby producers are more accountable for the end-of-life fate of their products.

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