

# Don't be trashy... keep on recycling

The discovery of thousands of tonnes of unprocessed recycling in shipping containers and warehouses has shaken public confidence in the industry. But South Australia's biggest processor has urged households to keep the faith, reports **COLIN JAMES**

**S**outh Australia's biggest recycling processor has appealed to people to keep using their yellow bins.

Northern Adelaide Waste  
Management Authority

(NAWMA) chief executive Adam Faulkner's plea follows the collapse of a Victorian company, which has left thousands of tonnes of unprocessed

material in shipping containers and warehouses.

Mr Faulkner said the situation involving SKM Recycling was an isolated

incident.

NAWMA and a private recycling company, Visy, are now processing all of the recycling material collected by SA councils, with most of it being sold as part of the emer-

ging “circular economy”. “South Australians should not lose confidence in the recycling system,” said Mr Faulkner.

“NAWMA processes around half of the state’s yellow-top bins at Edinburgh Parks, and markets the sorted paper, plastics, glass and metals locally in South Australia and across Australia.

“Between NAWMA and Visy, all household yellow-top bins are now being responsibly sorted and recycled in SA.”

The situation is vastly different to the state’s recycling industry 18 months ago.

SKM had contracts with various South Australian councils to buy their yellow-bin material for around \$8 a tonne. It was taken to depots at Wingfield and Lonsdale, where

it was baled up and trucked to plants in Victoria or sorted for export to countries such as India, China, Indonesia and Vietnam.

SKM began experiencing serious problems in March last year, when China banned the importation of recycling material. It then had a huge fire at its main Melbourne facility, prompting the Victorian EPA to close its plants. In South Australia, the company was already in strife over using shipping containers to store growing stockpiles of recycling at its main depot at Wingfield, in Adelaide’s west.

SKM had been given permission by the EPA and Port Adelaide Enfield Council to use up to 1100 containers as it dealt with the aftermath of the China ban and the fire in Vic-

toria. With recycling building up, it rented warehouses across

Melbourne to store the waste, including thousands of tonnes sent from Adelaide.

The company abruptly closed its SA operations in May. That left councils, which had been relying on SKM to take their yellow-bin material, looking for new processors.

Most ended up doing deals with NAWMA while others negotiated contracts with Visy, which operates a recycling plant at Wingfield.

In the meantime, SKM failed to move the shipping containers from Wingfield, despite being ordered by the EPA to get them off the site by June. It also left thousands more tonnes of recycling, mostly paper and cardboard, in a large shed at Lonsdale. The full extent of

the problem only emerged last month, when SKM financially collapsed with debts of \$100 million. With the future of its Adelaide stockpiles still uncertain, NAWMA has taken on processing the majority of recycling collected by councils.

“We’ve gone from three councils when we opened three years ago to 28, from Port Lincoln to Bordertown,” Mr Faulkner said. “We are running two shifts a day, five days a week. The plant is pretty much at capacity.”

**N**AWMA receives around 1000 tonnes of recycling each week, collected by trucks which empty between 300 to 400 yellow bins twice a day during their runs through Adelaide’s suburbs. The trucks dump the material in a large concrete bay before it is sorted by computerised machinery and a team of staff working beside a conveyor belt.

Glass, paper, cardboard, metal and plastic is separated into piles, which are compacted, baled and sent off to various customers who melt, pulp

or grind the material so it can be reused in what is known as the “circular economy”.

“They are all commodities of high value,” said Mr Faulkner. “Each bale of cardboard is worth around \$200 and there is a massive market in India for recycled cardboard that can’t be recycled in Australia due to the lack of capacity.”

Mr Faulkner said it was vital yellow-bin material arrived at NAWMA in good condition so

it could be reused. “Contamination in yellow bins is our biggest issue, so we spend a lot of time trying to educate people on what they need to do.

“We get as many groups through as we can to see what we do. Our approach is not to run around putting grumpy faces on bins. We want to have a conversation about how everyone can help.”

NAWMA’s ability to process the thousands of bottles it receives each week is to be enhanced with the construction of a new \$1.5 million processing facility, which will use robots to help sort the glass. With five other Adelaide councils set to follow NAWMA’s lead by setting up recycling plants, the investment is part of a strategy by Mr Faulkner and his board of directors to ensure the authority stays at the forefront of recycling.

“We have customers for everything we process and it is only getting bigger,” he said.

“We are talking to our councils about buying the products made from our plastic and glass, like bollards and road surfacing, so it all comes back. Everyone’s a winner.”

Mr Faulkner said NAWMA had simple advice for households on how to use their yellow bins properly.

“We don’t talk about lids or labels,” he said. “We don’t do the scrunch test. If it’s a household plastic container with a lid, it goes in. If it is paper, card-

board, a metal or aluminium food or beverage containers or a glass food or beverage container, it goes in the yellow bin.

"If in doubt, leave it out."

## WHAT HAPPENS TO IT

### PAPER

Newspapers, magazines and other paper is sent from NAWMA to pulp mills, where it is used to make newsprint and new packaging.



### CARDBOARD

Cardboard is one of the most valuable recycling commodities, fetching about \$200 a bale. NAWMA sells it to pulp mills in Australia and overseas.

### GLASS

Glass is ground up and melted in furnaces to create more glass for use in wine bottles, beer bottles and soft drink bottles made in SA.



### PLASTIC

NAWMA sends plastic to two Kilburn companies, where it is granulated and poured into moulds to produce a variety of products, ranging from fake timber decking to park benches.

### METAL

Containers are flattened, compressed into bales and sent by NAWMA to Sims Metal, where they are melted to create more metal.



## WHICH BIN TO USE

### DO

- Put all paper and cardboard into the yellow bin, flattening boxes to create space.
- Put all metal tins, glass bottles, plastic containers, aerosol cans, milk and juice cartons into the yellow bin.
- Take lids off all plastic containers. Put them into a separate clear container.
- Scrunch up clean aluminium foil and baking trays into balls larger than a fist. Put into yellow bin.
- Put all garden organics, such as lawn clippings and hedge trimmings, into the green bin. Never put compostable material into the yellow bin.
- Put all food scraps and biodegradable material – such as hair and bones, tissues and shredded paper, tea bags, coffee grounds and pet waste – into the green bin.

### DON'T

- Do not put pizza boxes with food scraps into the yellow bin. Put them into the green bin. Wiped pizza boxes can go into the yellow bin.
- Never put your recycling inside plastic bags into the yellow bin. Keep it loose.
- Do not use the yellow bin for hard waste, such as empty gas bottles.
- Do not put plastic bags, food pouches, bubble wrap, silver-lined packaging or food packaging into the yellow bin. Most of these can be recycled at supermarket collection points.
- Do not use the yellow bin for hazardous waste, such as paints, poisons and cleaning products. Take all hazardous rubbish to a resource recovery centre.







**STACKING UP:** Northern Adelaide Waste Management Authority chief executive Adam Faulkner says councils are embracing the opportunity to boost the recycling industry in South Australia.

Picture: COLIN JAMES