

Case Study: Resource recovery of problem waste at MUDs

COUNCIL NAME

City of Canterbury
Bankstown

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POPULATION

346,302

Overview

Canterbury Bankstown Council ran an innovative trial to recover and recycle problem wastes from multi-unit dwellings (MUDs). Bins and collection points were installed at 16 MUDs to allow for collection and recycling of polystyrene, soft plastic, cardboard, e-waste, clothing and mattresses.

Background

Driven by the NSW Waste and Resource Recovery Strategy (2014-2021) recycling targets, the former Canterbury Council set out to identify new opportunities to increase recycling rates.

In 2015, Council carried out an audit and inspection to identify opportunities for increased recycling in MUDs. The audit highlighted that a number of recyclable problem wastes were ending up in general waste bins or were being dumped in common areas. These items included polystyrene, soft plastics, e-waste, mattresses and clothing. Council's contractor had also reported that large volumes of cardboard and polystyrene were being generated at new MUDs when tenants moved in simultaneously.

Desktop research revealed that there were no councils in Australia that had a source separation and collection system in place for additional recyclable materials from MUDs. This provided Council the opportunity to break new ground with this project.

Implementation

Council engaged with the community to understand their views and to identify the objectives of the trial. This engagement included a forum and face to face discussions. The result was that there was unanimous support for new recycling initiatives and the community wanted Council to be innovative and reach out to culturally diverse residents. The community also requested simple infrastructure with visual signage to help them recycle more.

The project objectives were to increase recycling of problem wastes, to provide improved infrastructure, to help the culturally and linguistically diverse community recycle more, and to increase awareness of recycling in MUDs.

Prior to the trial, Council also engaged extensively with internal and external stakeholders, including Housing NSW, the collection contractor and local community groups to iron out potential issues with the trial. Significant attention was given to selecting the infrastructure to be provided, aiming for ease of use. It was decided to use blue 660L bins for e-waste, metal cage bins for clothing, metal stands with large plastic bags for polystyrene and soft plastic and stacking space for cardboard. Feedback was also sought on the communication methods for the trial. It was agreed that flyers in letter boxes and signage in common areas were to be used.

The trial serviced 16 MUDs, including 2 new MUDs, each containing over 200 units. The project was for a 3 year period with an established budget of \$35,000. Council used funding available from the Environment Protection Authority's Better Waste and Recycling Fund for this project. Council obtained quotes from recyclers for the various streams of waste to be collected under the trial and established a collection and processing plan. The trial commenced in mid-2015.

Outcomes

The following outcomes were achieved through the trial:

- Positive feedback has been received from all 16 MUDs.
- Contamination levels came down to just 4% in participating MUDs.
- \$13,477 was spent between July 2015 and March 2017 (21 months).
- 10,660kg of bulky cardboard, 740kg of soft plastic, 940kg of polystyrene, 9,300kg of e-waste, 4,210kg of clothing and 50 mattresses were collected from the 16 MUDs during the 21 month period.

Key Learnings

A number of challenges and learnings were identified during this project which will help other councils pursuing similar projects:

- Engaging with building managers or cleaners about recycling was a key obstacle encountered. However as waste is the most challenging issue faced by most building managers, they are easily engaged once a face-to-face meeting is established.
- Identifying the right type of bins for the various waste streams. 1100L bins were trialled for large cardboard, but the size of these bins was problematic for storage and collection purposes. In the end the collection contractor agreed to collect bulky cardboard from neatly piled stacks.
- A number of MUDs only wanted to source separate specific items such as e-waste, clothing or mattresses. These requests were supported by Council.
- Flyer drops were not an effective communication method for MUDs as residents are often inundated with promotional material. Signage in the bin room and common areas is more effective.
- Other items such as household batteries, hazardous waste and food waste could be added to this project.

Council learnt that source separation of problem waste is achievable with appropriate collaboration, engagement and provision of fit for purpose infrastructure.

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This project was the 2017 winner of the Community Waste Services Award at the LGNSW Excellence in the Environment Awards