

Australia reaches new heights in newspaper recycling

Australia has hit a new high in recycling of its newspapers with a national average of 73.5 per cent for 2003 according to the annual report on the recovered newsprint market from the Publishers National Environment Bureau (PNEB).

The report, produced for the PNEB by the News Limited Environmental Secretariat, showed that Australia used 718,482 tonnes of newsprint in 2003 and recovered 528,393 tonnes. This was up from 681,766 tonnes consumed and 496,631 recycled for a national rate of 72.8 per cent in 2002.

Frank Kelett, PNEB executive director, said the 2003 figures for the USA had not been released but Australia had been in front since 1997 and he believed the latest Australian figure was the best in the world.

Commenting on the figures, Tony Wilkins, News Limited Environmental Secretariat manager said the rise was despite the increase in newsprint used of about 37,000 tonnes above 2002. Both paperboard and newsprint manufacture consumed more old newspapers. Exports dropped marginally despite stable/rising prices.

Gains in recycling rates were achieved across Queensland, Australian Capital Territory, New South Wales and Victoria. The best performers were NSW and Victoria on 77 per cent each, followed by the ACT on 74.6 and WA on 70.6.

Western Australia actually dropped from 73.6 in 2002 but this actually represented an increase of about 4000 tonnes of old newspapers collected but this was offset by newsprint consumption rising by almost 9000 tonnes.

Other state percentages were: Queensland 68.3 (up from 66.4 in 2002); SA 65 (down from 68.1) and Tasmania 64.8 (down from 72.4).

Dr Wilkins reported that some new and novel uses for old newspapers emerged, such as a dust suppressant in Whyalla, South Australia.

“One Steel is delighted with results of a Collex solution to wind-blown dust from its stockpiles of coal, coke, pelletised iron and screening fines,” he said.

“Old newspapers are hydro-mulched and sprayed over stockpiles. An additional benefit to both council and One Steel is the suitability of this paper pulp mixture as a medium for direct seeding of ground cover in non-operational areas as a more permanent and environmentally friendly solution to dust suppression and the greening of local areas.”

The recycled newsprint went into new newsprint after de-inking at the Norske Skog plant in Albury, southern NSW (105,294 tonnes), cardboard manufacture in Australia (231,435 tonnes), export – mainly to Asia for new newsprint (142,368 tonnes) and 41,409 tonnes for ‘other uses’, mainly converted to home insulation ‘wool’, and papier mache products like egg cartons.

A total of 4887 tonnes went to “Alternative Waste Technologies” – going into compost digesters.

Mr Kelett said “While we are pleased to see old newspapers being diverted from landfill destroying them to make compost is the least desirable financial, social and environmental outcome. De-inking the old newspapers (and old magazines) to make new newsprint means the fibre can be reused, again and again.