



Understanding drivers of recycling behaviour in ACT multi-unit dwellings

The **National Waste Policy** calls for knowledge sharing around behaviour change strategies that improve the value Australia harnesses from disposed materials. To that end, in **November 2018** the Department of the Environment and Energy partnered with the Australian Capital Territory Government's 'ACT NoWaste' on a behavioural research project to:

- measure recycling contamination in multi-unit dwellings (MUDs)
- explore residents' knowledge, attitudes and behaviours
- evaluate a communications campaign.

RESEARCH METHODS

Bin audits at eight ACT MUDs of various types known to have contamination problems

Survey, both
paper and online

116
residents



In-depth
interviews

39
residents

Contamination rates across the eight MUDs varied between 12% and 85%. This contamination was made up of:

60%

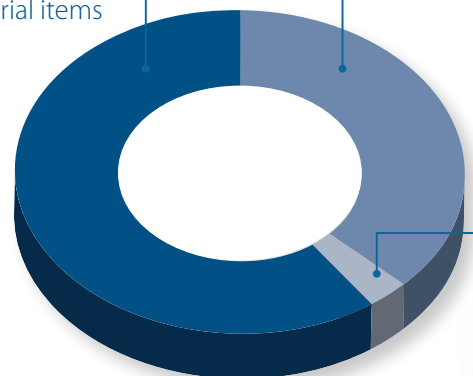
'other' e.g.
textiles and bulky,
multi-material items

37%

plastic bags
full of items

3%

organic or
hazardous
waste



ALL PARTICIPANTS

- are enthusiastic about recycling
- trust the local government and their building managers
- put ambiguous items in the rubbish bin.



PLASTIC BAGGERS

- dump recyclables inside plastic bags
- believe that bags are recyclable
- have a steady supply of plastic bags
- are motivated by ease.

“ I don't get how come plastic bags can't go in the recycle bin... They could melt it down. ”



NEW RECYCLERS

- have migrated from somewhere with a less robust recycling system
- are inexperienced so sometimes confused.

“ The first time I come here I see the roommates come here. I do what the roommate does. ”



THE OVERCONFIDENT MAJORITY

- believe they are already fully informed
- make at least one significant error
- do not pay attention to signs or communication materials
- may proactively try to change fellow residents' behaviour.

“ I'm fairly switched on. I know what you can and can't recycle. I just assumed you can't recycle metal. ”

BIN 'CLEANING' IS COMMON

- Building managers or cleaners tend to 'clean' recycling bins before collection trucks arrive by sorting contaminants into the appropriate bin. This particularly occurs in larger MUDs.
- As a result, MUD contamination rates reported across Australia probably underestimate problems with residents' recycling behaviour.



The **communication campaign** by ACT NoWaste was effective at informing residents and changing their behaviour. It involved signs in bin areas and brochures delivered to units. Interviews suggested the brochures were more effective.