

Compost Australia Policy Statement

The Introduction of Compostable Products and Packaging



Compost Australia, as the peak body representing commercial composters across the nation, is aware that contamination is a significant problem in source separated organic materials delivered to commercial composting operations.

Compost Australia represents over fifty (50) commercial composting businesses (>70% of businesses processing over 15,000 tonnes per annum) and over 250 professionals who are involved in organic recycling.

Compost Australia defines *compostable* materials as materials that biodegrade through the action of naturally occurring micro-organisms and do so completely during aerobic composting processes that comply with the minimum standards set out in the Australian Standard for Composts, Soil Conditioners and Mulches (AS4454:2003).

Compost Australia and its members are aware that compostable products and packaging, including plastic bags, are being progressively introduced into the Australian economy and are starting to appear in waste streams around the country.

The introduction of compostable products and packaging present three main issues for commercial composters:

- a. Manufacturers claims that their products and packaging are completely compostable are not always true in an Australian commercial composting context;
- b. Existing collection and processing systems put in place to manage source separated organic materials must be adapted (largely through a communication process) before they can accept each compostable product or packaging material; and
- c. Compostable plastics are considered contaminants in some mixed waste processing systems specifically designed to recover film plastics as a commodity.

The primary contaminant in source separated garden organics is plastic film, predominantly in the form of plastic bags.

In general, plastic bags create the following issues in commercial composting operations

- a. They act as a convenient receptacle to hide non-compostable contaminants in feedstocks that enter the facility;
- b. They may be partially removed in pre-sorting operations to be landfilled with other contaminants;
- c. Residual bags in the organics stream will be shredded as part of the mix preparation process with the film fragments increasing the potential for litter issues both during the shredding process and during subsequent processing operations; and
- d. If residual film fragments remain in the compost they must be removed by screening/air classification to be landfilled prior to sale of the product, as many end users are highly intolerant of such contaminants.

Compost Australia is committed to working with key stakeholders to maximise the benefits of compostable plastics and packaging, whilst ensuring any negative impacts on commercial composting operators are minimised.

Compost Australia is committed to working with the Australasian Bioplastics Association and its members to facilitate the necessary communication, education and adaption of products, packaging and collection/processing systems.

The members of Compost Australia, a Division of the Waste Management Association agree that:

1. The number of single-use plastic bags sold or given away should be reduced.
2. Independently certified compostable products and packaging made from renewable resources should be introduced into the economy.
3. Additives to conventional plastics (non-renewable resources) that are designed to make those plastics degrade over a specified time should be discouraged.
4. Manufacturers and retailers planning to undertake marketing initiatives designed to promote disposal of compostable products and packaging using existing organic recycling systems must actively communicate with:
 - a. The Recycled Organics Industry through Compost Australia and/or its relevant state working groups;
 - b. The organisation managing the collection and transport of organic wastes;
 - c. The organisation managing the organic recycling system.
5. Where the necessary education and system adaption has not occurred compostable products and packaging should be placed in the general waste stream (landfilled).