

Steward of change: stewardship for safety and environment

By John Gertsakis, Thursday 28 September 2017

It's always refreshing to see new product categories added to the list of product stewardship initiatives being developed in Australia. It's also a sign that more manufacturers and service providers can see the broader environmental and social benefits of managing the impacts associated with their products.



Consumer appetite for stewardship schemes that meet a clear need and are also equitable in their coverage nationwide, is strong and ever-increasing, but not always uncomplicated and adequately funded. Some are mature and meet community expectations, while others are nascent and in development. Recent history has also shown us that not all product stewardship schemes are straightforward to design, fund and implement.

While there are multiple definitions and models of product stewardship and extended producer responsibility, the essence remains consistent. It primarily involves product manufacturers and associated service providers (including retailers) taking greater responsibility for their products across the life cycle from design and production all the way through to consumption and end-of-life management. Of course, there is a need for consumers and other players to play their role, and the need to share responsibility is essential.

A new product category being investigated for stewardship action in Australia is the child car safety seat. Not always associated with take-back and recycling programs, the majority of these seats go straight to landfill at end-of-life despite being high recyclable. Over 90% of a typical child car safety seat contains materials that can be recovered and reprocessed when correctly dismantled. The category includes rear facing infant carriers and bases, forward facing seats and booster seats.

A trial program has been running for several months in Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland, with a view to generating information and data that can inform the design of a permanent national scheme.

An important aspect of the trial is its attention to both resource recovery and recycling as well as road safety requirements. This highlights a more holistic approach to defining product stewardship with a view to addressing multiple objectives.

A child may outgrow more than two safety seats before they are old enough to sit in a car without one. While some parents may choose to re-use seats or purchase them secondhand, it is recommended that child car safety seats be disposed of 10 years after the date of manufacture.

This is to protect children due to wear and tear and degradation of the seat, and to ensure outdated products are removed from the market and replaced by child restraints that meet current safety standards. Disposing of a child car safety seat once it reaches its fixed life span or after it has been involved in a crash can also give parents and carers peace of mind that their child will be protected.

In simple terms, removing worn or damaged child car safety seats from being reused not only protects children and infants, but provides an opportunity to responsibly divert seats into an efficient resource recovery and recycling program.

The trial program has provided parents and carers with a free and environmentally-positive option for disposing of their old child car restraints. By collecting and disassembling the seats on-site, the trial aims to divert in excess of 900 tonnes of waste away from landfill and back into the recycling stream.

Damien Wigley, who co-designed the trial, thought the challenge would be to encourage families to divert used seats that are currently left on the kerbside as litter, sold in garage sales or make their way into second hand stores and onto on-line shopping sites, for recycling.

"It's been very encouraging that the community has been so responsive to disposing their seats in a responsible and convenient way," said Wigley.

Enthusiastic collaboration between stakeholders has been a key feature of how the trial has been designed and implemented. A strong partnership approach has also helped to maximise community engagement and raise broader awareness about the potential for a permanent program.

The trial program received funding and support from the Queensland and NSW governments (Waste Less Recycle More Initiative - NSW), Victorian Metropolitan Waste and Resource Recovery Group as well as major car seat brands including Dorel and InfaSecure and automotive association representatives from RACV, NRMA, RAA and RACT. Kidsafe and various social enterprises have also been involved in the trial's promotion and delivery. Equilibrium developed the trial and managed the overall implementation.

Visit the trial program [web page](#) for more information.

[image_library_tag f5c82489-8bb1-4f46-bf0f-6525dd18b1dc 1200x900 alt=" trial" width="1200"] A trial program has been running for several months in Vic, NSW and Q the design of a permanent national product stewardship scheme.

Major circular economy conference set for Adelaide

Interest and activity in all things circular is building worldwide in the face of linear economic models failing to deliver sustainable outcomes. 'Powering the Change' is the first Australasian conference entirely dedicated to the challenges of implementing the circular economy.

On November 15-17 at the Tonsley Innovation District in South Australia, more than 200 businesses, government and academia will come together to collaborate and discuss how the circular economy can, and is being, implemented.

The event has secured some significant international keynote speakers from the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, IBM, AXA and the London Waste and Recycling Board, including:

- Casper Jorna, CE100 program lead at the Ellen MacArthur Foundation (UK). The CE100 is an innovation program that brings together 100 international powerhouses like Google, Danone and Unilever, universities and governments to implement circular economy approaches
- Jad Oseyran, lead - IBM Global Centre of Competence for Circular Economy (Netherlands) who is building on the expertise developed in IBM's global asset recovery services and advanced analytics capabilities to support companies and cities to transition to circular economy approaches.
- Stuart Ferguson, head of investment at the London Waste and Recycling Board (UK), who will share how London is both supporting startups get to market, and helping traditional SMEs pivot, using circular approaches.
- Dr Cécile Wendling, group head of foresight at AXA (France), who will share her insights on developing new insurance policies to support risk management in a more circular economy.

Conference streams will cover corporate and government topics as well as academic research and workshops. One of the discussion panels will focus on how circular solutions for electronics can be accelerated in Australia.

Visit the conference [web page](#) for more information and to register.

John Gertsakis is Equilibrium's director of communications. A communications and sustainability professional, Gertsakis is an advocate for sound industry policy, relevant government reform, and practical environmental stewardship based on good science and current research.

Gertsakis is also Inside Waste's Steward of change columnist, providing case studies as well as opinion and thought leadership pieces on all things product stewardship, circular economy and life cycle thinking related, once every six weeks. Contact: john@equil.com.au

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