

In Brief

Packaging recycling initiatives to harvest more waste

The National Packaging Covenant has funded Transpacific Industries to set up a national recycling program called Harvest for bulk packaging – cardboard, plastic film and expanded polystyrene – and food and beverage containers from commercial and industrial waste streams.

The Covenant is a non-profit partnership between government and industry that aims to increase Australia's packaging recycling rate to 65 per cent by 2010. Under the Harvest program, businesses will be provided with specially marked bins – landfill, recycle (for bulk packaging) and comix (for beverage and food containers) – that are expected to divert around 80 000 tonnes of packaging waste from landfill over the next two years.

The Covenant is behind two other recent recycling initiatives for plastic bags and cling wrap, and for polystyrene. Plastic bags and cling wrap have been hard to recycle due to limited sorting and collection systems, and lack of reprocessing plants



The sorting and collection of business packaging and waste and recycling of plastic bags, plastic film and polystyrene are the latest initiatives of the National Packaging Covenant. Matt Matthews, iStockphoto

in Australia. The Covenant has funded Sydney recycler WSN Environmental Solutions to develop a local facility to process plastic bags and cling wrap and other post-consumer plastics.

The new plant will clean and reprocess flexible plastic waste extracted from household rubbish at an existing facility that separates domestic mixed-waste streams (including organic matter, which is converted to green energy and exported to the NSW energy

grid). The clean plastic waste will be sold to manufacturers.

The Covenant has also funded the Mildura Regional Waste Management Group to buy an 'agglomerator' machine for recycling expandable polystyrene (EPS) packaging. The agglomerator shreds and flakes the EPS into a recyclate that will be sold to a company, Ausplaztik, which will use it to build playgrounds, park benches and other products.

www.packagingcovenant.org.au

Government and Google get behind geothermal



The cost barriers to the development of geothermal include the high cost of drilling and resource mapping. Geodynamics, iStockphoto

The Australian Government has announced a \$50 million program to support geothermal energy development. The funding will help subsidise the high cost of drilling deep geothermal wells, financing proof-of-concept projects and thermal mapping.

Geothermal energy production involves pumping water up to 5 km underground, where it is heated by 'hot rocks' and the resultant heat energy used to generate electricity. Prospective geothermal resources have been identified in every Australian state. The government hopes to see Australia's first commercially viable baseload geothermal power plants in place within four to five years.

At the time of the Australian announcement, Google publicly pledged to invest more than US\$10 million on geothermal energy initiatives in the US.

Expanding conservation reserve in the Kimberley

The non-profit Australian Wildlife Conservancy (AWC) has bought Marion Downs Station, 350 km east of Derby in the West Australian Kimberley, to expand a private conservation reserve it established earlier when it purchased the neighbouring Mornington Station.

The Australian Government has provided \$2 million for the AWC to link the two pastoral leases

to create a private conservation reserve one-third the size of Tasmania – about 6400 sq km – making it one of the world's largest private reserves. The habitat provided by the reserve will protect endangered animals such as the Gouldian finch, the northern quoll and more than 700 plant species. The AWC has been trialling early burning regimes and feral animal culls to protect native species.



The new reserve will protect the habitat of a number of endangered animals such as the Gouldian finch. Joanne Harris & Daniel Bubhich, iStockphoto