



newsletter

September 2022

The first half of 2022 has seen the PVC Recycling in Hospitals program continue to grow with participation numbers passing the significant milestone of 300 hospitals Australia wide. We extend our thanks to everyone for their continued involvement and passion for the program and look forward to seeing what can be achieved for the remainder of 2022.

Program continues to grow

Despite the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic continuing into 2022 with reductions to elective surgeries in most states and ongoing transportation complications, we are pleased to report that the PVC Recycling in Hospitals program continues to grow with over 50 new hospitals joining the program since mid-2021.

There are now more than 330 hospitals around Australia currently participating in the program, and in recent months the scheme has expanded to more regional areas of the country including Albany in WA and Rockhampton in QLD. Collections are currently on hold in Tasmania as a new collection partner is sought, however it is hoped that this will be up and running again shortly.

We continue to receive regular expressions of interest from hospitals across the country to join the program, and participation numbers have continued to grow steadily throughout 2022 with a number of hospitals re-joining the program along with new hospitals signing up for the first time.

Help us increase collections

Following the finalisation of the 2021 data, we can report that the program collected 119 tonnes of PVC medical

**In 2021:
119 tonnes
5.95 million IV bags
33 new hospitals**

recycling across Australia during 2021, equivalent to 5.95 million IV fluid bags. The year's collection data takes the total amount recycled to over 545 tonnes since 2015 - equivalent to over 27 million IV bags!

However, 2021's collections are down slightly from the 129 tonnes collected during 2020 and we encourage everyone involved in the program to help us get collection numbers back up to pre-Covid levels and beyond by helping to spread the word about the program and ensuring ongoing reminders to hospital staff to make use of the PVC recycling bins.

Additionally, contamination continues to be an issue and a focus on reducing contamination will help make the most of the PVC that is recycled. High amounts of contamination by non-PVC items and foreign matter leads to collections having to be disposed of as contaminated medical waste, rather than recycled, which is both expensive and also a waste of the PVC in the

collections that would otherwise be able to be recycled.

Program partner Baxter Healthcare have developed a range of new and updated program materials including posters which clearly outline what is and isn't suitable to be included in PVC recycling bins, and we encourage all participating hospitals to display these around your bins if you are not already.

These posters can be requested and sent to your hospital via the following link: www.baxterprofessional.com.au/sustainability/request-materials



The updated program poster details the common waste materials that should be left out of PVC recycling bins.

5-year 50 million IV bags target

During 2020 the VCA and program partners Welvic and Baxter Healthcare agreed to a new long-term target for the program: over a five-year period until 2025, the program aims to recycle the equivalent of 50 million IV bags within Australia, with recovered volumes measured annually at calendar year end.

So far, the program has collected the equivalent of about 12.4 million IV bags across 2020-21, with the ongoing effects of the pandemic causing a decrease in expected volumes and meaning that the program is not quite on track to reach the target of 50 million by 2025.

However, as participation numbers continue to increase and hospitals become more accustomed to the new normality of living with Covid-19, it is hoped that the 50 million target remains within reach.

In order to achieve the target, the focus will be on increasing collection at existing hospitals by ensuring all relevant departments within facilities are implementing the program, and importantly reducing contamination.

Who can join the program?

If your facility is interested in joining the program, please contact the Vinyl Council of Australia to obtain the relevant information on how to become involved.

Please note, in order to join the program participating facilities must be able to supply at least 2 full 240L bins of PVC per month – any less than this amount is not economic to transport and results in material sitting for too long in bins leading to potential contamination.



A typical PVC IV-fluid bag in operation

PVC recycling in vet clinics

There has been a sustained interest from vet clinics in recent months in regards to joining the program, with a number around the country signing up to recycle their used PVC. While the program happily accepts PVC collections from vet clinics, many smaller clinics are understandably not able to supply enough recycling to fill the two 240L bins per month which make collections worthwhile.

We encourage vet clinics that would like to join the program but are not going to be able to fill two bins per month to sign up via the normal process and then contact the local waste management collection service involved in the program to organise the collection of their PVC recycling with the collection service directly. The collection services currently operating in the program are Rentokil Initial in Victoria, and Cleanaway Daniels in all other states where the program is currently operational.

If your vet clinic is interested in joining the program and would like to find out more about the details involved in collections, please contact the Vinyl Council of Australia and your query can be passed on to the relevant Baxter Healthcare representative for assistance.

Epworth Richmond leading the way

One of the most consistent high-performing hospitals over recent reporting periods has been Epworth Richmond Hospital, with the hospital averaging over 250kg of recycled PVC per month in their collection bins through the first half of 2022. That's enough for around 2km of recycled garden hose, each month!

Having been involved in the PVC Recycling in Hospitals program for many years, sustainability has long been a large focus at Epworth Richmond. According to the hospital's Sustainability Manager Simon Mikedis, Epworth identified that despite being known as a valuable recyclable resource, PVC items were making up a significant share of the hospital's waste stream which prior to their involvement in the recycling program was being sent directly to landfill.

Coupled with the hospital's strategic commitment to improving sustainability and recognising the rising cost of sending waste to landfill, Epworth has worked hard to

make education and communication with staff a key focus in order to make their recycling of PVC such a success. This has included active cross-organisational staff involvement and promotion of the program via various sustainability committees, distribution of educational program posters and other materials and acknowledgement of ongoing recycling progress (in association with Baxter Healthcare statistics) through internal newsletters and channels.

Simon points to the establishment of 'recycling champions' in each ward as also being integral to the hospital's success in their recycling efforts, with help always at hand to educate and assist staff in determining the materials that are and aren't permitted in the PVC recycling bins in order to reduce contamination from non-PVC waste. As one of the largest hospitals in Victoria, it is great to see Epworth Richmond's commitment to sustainability and the recycling of used PVC within a circular economy, and we look forward to seeing their ongoing recycling achievements going forward.

Overseas Initiatives:

VinylPlus Med scheme in underway in Belgium

A new medical PVC recycling scheme in Belgium continues to expand following its official launch in October last year, with four hospitals in Brussels now providing used PVC disposables for collection and a further 29 on the waiting list to join soon.

The scheme, called VinylPlus Med, aims to accelerate sustainability in healthcare across Europe by focusing on the recycling of clean PVC waste that can be recycled into a wide range of value products that comply with strict European health and safety regulations.

The project is currently being piloted in Belgium, but it is hoped that if successful it will expand into many countries across Europe.

The scheme is being managed by VinylPlus, the team behind the European PVC industry's commitment to sustainable development, and includes Renewi as the waste management company and Raff Plastics as the recycler.



Recycled PVC medical waste is used to manufacture a range of new, high-performance products, here in Australia.

PVCMed Alliance release report on PVC in healthcare

PVCMed Alliance, the European Council of Vinyl Manufacturers' platform to raise awareness and promote the use of PVC in healthcare, has released a 24-page document titled "Why PVC should remain the preferred material in healthcare and elsewhere". The document outlines a number of key points including the fact that PVC can be recycled, has specific functional properties that make it very difficult to replace, and does not cause harm to human health and the environment.

Please contact the Vinyl Council Australia if you need any further details or assistance with PVC Recycling in Hospitals. And don't forget there are videos that may be of help in your education and training sessions, including the useful 'Tips and Tricks'.

This document is, in part, a response to a paper published in late 2021 by a prominent European NGO which encouraged the phasing out of PVC in healthcare. In their response, PVCMed Alliance point to the fact that the paper made many false and unsubstantiated claims about PVC and its role in healthcare.

"The paper contains so many errors that we must urge European policymakers and hospitals to disregard it," said Ole Grøndahl Hansen, PVCMed Alliance Project Manager. "Many hospitals around Europe are currently investigating how to implement circular initiatives for their plastic waste, and if they decide to follow the recommendations from NGOs, hospitals will do more harm than good for the environment."

With a market share of around 30%, PVC is the most used plastic for medical devices in Europe because of its' unique performance characteristics.



Thanks to all who recycle PVC in hospitals. Great work!

A special thanks to our wonderful partners in our suppliers, reprocessors and collectors, in particular VCA members Baxter Healthcare, Welvic Australia, Aces Medical Waste, Cleanaway Daniels and Rentokil Initial. The program would be impossible without all participants working together to ensure the value of PVC can be retained in a circular economy.



To contribute useful Fast Facts or Top Tips to help others and share stories, or to find out more about this product stewardship program and how to get involved, contact us: **Vinyl Council of Australia ACN: 083 012 533, 1.02 Junction Business Centre, 22 St Kilda Rd, St Kilda, Victoria, Australia, 3182, T: +61 3 9510 1711 E: info@vinyl.org.au W:www.vinyl.org.au**