



## IN SPACE NO-ONE HEARS YOU RECYCLE

I'm often asked by students, "what do astronauts do with their urine in space?" Now they have watched ABC's "Sleek Geeks" show and seen the audience drink Adam Spencer's recycled urine, the idea of re-using waste water is not so silly. The current space station has installed a filter which will turn urine into drinking water. We realise that it is something that would make most people cringe. Would you drink it? Stacey discusses the issue below (photo Aquacell system, Birrigai School ACT) Chris



## BLACK & GREY IS GREEN

With increasing pressure on our water supplies as a result of recent drought conditions and population growth in our metropolitan centres, water recycling is becoming established as a way of moving towards sustainable management of our resources and environment. But there are people who think it is not a good idea to recycle water because they think there is a health risk and it cannot be safe to drink. Wastewater has been recycled and used in Australian towns and cities for decades, but usually for watering recreational facilities such as parks and golf courses and farms. Start at home with your greywater. Greywater is the wastewater from your shower, bath, spa, hand basins, laundry tub, washing machine, dishwasher and kitchen sink. Water from toilets is called blackwater. I'll come to that soon. You can water your garden with greywater and save up to hundreds of litres of fresh water each day. Up until recently, council approval was required for greywater diversion devices to be installed in homes but the rules have changed. Check with BMCC for the latest. There is a small risk of pollution and health problems if you don't install the system properly using a plumber. The Birrigai Outdoor School in the ACT is using a Leura company to recycle its greywater. The same company was approached to recycle our school's blackwater to be flushed back down the toilets but the project fell through. Recycling water is done in other parts of the world so why is it so difficult in Australia? Stacey

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## COMPOSTING BOTTLES

In Australia only a third of plastic bottles are recycled. Most end up in landfill or the ocean, where can cause problems to animals. Will it ever be possible to put plastic bottles on the compost heap? Soon they may be able to be decomposed by bacteria (photo [www.treehugger.com](http://www.treehugger.com)). At Flinders University researchers are finding ways of doing this without using toxic chemicals. The edible chemicals are mixed with the plastic before it is set. Usually plastic is made from oil, which is made from organic matter just like your compost, except over a longer period of time. Depending on how much is



added, the bottle will survive for up to five years. The people at the Total Environment Centre are not so sure it will work.

"Recycling is still the way to go, because of the large amounts of energy and water saved in that process compared to that needed to make more packaging from scratch." they said. Jackson

# A MYNAH PROBLEM

Australia's National University have developed traps (Photo Chris Tidemann) which allow pest birds like pigeons (a real problem at our school) and Indian Mynahs to be humanely killed. Some have suggested that they could then be turned into compost. Clive Heyward-Barker from Con Soc says "Mynahs are a species of starling whose territorial behaviour when breeding leads them to exclude native animals like brush-tailed possums and



cockatoos from hollows. They are expanding in the Blue Mountains, particularly noticeable nowadays in the upper mountains towns as they used not to be there only a few years ago. They are becoming more abundant around the fringes of the world heritage area as they

spread out from Sydney, Newcastle, Wollongong". While this does not reflect the views of the Strobos editors or those in the Conservation Society, we welcome feedback. What do you think? Marc

# FRIES WITH THAT?

Is it possible to recycle waste cooking oil into fuel for cars? I decided to investigate. We know that diesel cars use less fuel per



kilometre than petrol but at the moment it is much more expensive. The local bushfire brigades use it in their trucks because it is safer in a fire. Like the ethanol used in E10 petrol, biodiesel is made from plants and produces less greenhouse gas, is cheaper and doesn't need any engine modification. Why then is it not available in Australia while common in other countries? A company in Byron Bay is now collecting used cooking oil to process into biodiesel. The problem is that if all the cooking oil used in Australia was recycled there would still not be enough to fuel all the diesel cars and trucks. A lot of cooking oil is recycled but most goes overseas to be made into soap. The NRMA advises motorists to make sure their warranty is not affected

before using it. Will the carbon dioxide reductions from using biodiesel be more than the carbon dioxide generated to produce, convert and transport the fuel and if farmers start to grow crops for fuel will food prices rise? One country in South America that has a huge biofuel market I discovered, has experienced a lot of illegal land clearing. So it's not that simple. The best thing you can do is to switch over to a hybrid fuel car. Most P platers can't afford to, so make sure you buy a small fuel efficient one instead. To find out which cars perform best check [www.greenvehicleguide.gov.au](http://www.greenvehicleguide.gov.au). Alastair

# DON'T DUMP YOUR DESKTOP

If you have an obsolete computer, there are a few options to dispose of it without adding to the landfill problem. If it's still working and only a few years



old, you could donate it to a community group so that it can be re-used. If your computer or monitor isn't working, check with the council about recycling schemes in the mountains. We

have heard Dell has a recycling system. Check with them. Planet Ark has set up a website [www.recyclingnearyou.com.au](http://www.recyclingnearyou.com.au) to help search for a local recycling centre. Even easier with your old mobile phones. Your school probably has a "mobile muster box". If not apply for one. It's important to remove files and personal stuff from the computer, whether you dispose or donate it. Use software or reformat the hard drive. Alastair

# SHOP & DROP

Finally if you are fed up with last year's fashion, or they are getting worn, recycle your old clothes. You can swap clothes with friends or give them away to a charity to resell. Better still, learn to sew and repair them or turn them into unique gear that you couldn't buy in the shops. If you stuff up they will never look out of place at Winter Magic. Fiona



[www.bluemountains.org.au](http://www.bluemountains.org.au)

