

Breakthrough Victoria's new Challenge program to tackle solar PV recycling

Breakthrough Victoria will invest up to \$10 million to tackle solar panel waste and develop scalable innovative technologies within Victoria as part of a new Challenge program.

With Australia's healthy appetite for solar energy fuelling a projected surge in end-of-life solar panels, the new Breakthrough Victoria Challenge has announced a first theme of solar panel recycling – and is calling on the innovation and recycling community for proposals to harvest their material potential and reduce waste.

The inaugural Breakthrough Victoria Challenge aims to drive investment in innovative solutions to address emerging environmental problems.

Solar panel recyclers and innovators seeking investment in solar waste solutions are invited to take up the Breakthrough Victoria Challenge through submission of a proposal on Breakthrough Victoria's official Challenge page: breakthroughvictoria.com/breakthrough-victoria-challenge.

Solar energy has played a crucial role in Australia's transition away from fossil fuels with more than 600,000 installed across Victoria. Panels have an average lifespan of 15 to 25 years before they need replacing due to technological advances, damage or lowered efficiency. With more than three million rooftop solar installations across the country, over 180,000 tonnes of solar panel waste are estimated to be generated in Victoria by 2035, based on Clean Energy Regulator data.

Breakthrough Victoria is calling for novel, commercial and scalable solutions that create high-value products from end-of-life solar panels, reducing the number of panels going to landfill and increasing the return from the panels through clean separation technology. Innovations may include new separation and recycling technologies, collection and logistics developments and ways to maximise harvesting of materials to create new, high value products.

Breakthrough Victoria CEO Grant Dooley said: "Victoria has a strong track record of innovation, and we are looking for innovators to solve the issue of solar panel waste well before it becomes a much bigger problem."

"The Breakthrough Victoria Challenge encourages solar and recycling experts across the spectrum of science, technology and infrastructure to look for creative solutions to unlock value in solar panel disposal and recycling."

One of the challenges the industry faces is the retrieval of valuable components like silicon and silver, which can be potentially harvested and repurposed for other industry applications. Improvements in technology have the potential to increase the value of recovered waste materials as waste volumes grow exponentially.

"It's clear that investment in alternative waste management solutions is needed to develop the technology to generate value in solar recycling," Mr Dooley said.

"End-of-life solar panels embody the circular economy challenge the industry faces, but also the opportunity of turning a waste stream into a commercial product and creating a strong market for the solar panel recycling industry.

"This is a first step in helping accelerate and scale up a commercially viable system of solar panel recycling in Victoria."

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About Breakthrough Victoria

Breakthrough Victoria is an independent company that manages a \$2 billion fund set up by the Victorian Government to make Victoria a global leader in innovation. We invest for impact to develop the commercial potential of innovations and partner with businesses and other investors to generate jobs, economic growth and returns over the long term that flow back to Victoria. Breakthrough Victoria paves the way for innovators to commercialise their ideas and support technology development across five growth sectors. These include health and life sciences, clean economy, advanced manufacturing, agri-food and digital technologies.