

Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle

Produce Less Waste by Practicing the 3 Rs:

Reduce the amount and toxicity of trash you discard.

Reuse containers and products; repair what is broken or give it to someone who can repair it.

Recycle as much as possible, which includes buying products with recycled content.

Reduce

Waste prevention, or "source reduction," means consuming and throwing away less. It includes:

- purchasing durable, long-lasting goods;
- seeking products and packaging that are as free of toxics as possible;
- redesigning products to use less raw material in production, have a longer life, or be used again after its original use.

Source reduction actually prevents the generation of waste in the first place, so it is the most preferred method of waste management and goes a long way toward protecting the environment.

Reuse

Reusing items -- by repairing them, donating them to charity and community groups, or selling them -- also reduces waste. Reusing products, when possible, is even better than recycling because the item does not need to be reprocessed before it can be used again.

Resource Conservation Challenge (RCC)

EPA's national effort to conserve natural resources and energy by managing materials more efficiently

Ways to Reuse

- Using durable coffee mugs.
- Using cloth napkins or towels.
- Refilling bottles.
- Donating old magazines or surplus equipment.
- Reusing boxes.
- Turning empty jars into containers for leftover food.
- Purchasing refillable pens and pencils.
- Participating in a paint collection and reuse program.

Recycle

Recycling turns materials that would otherwise become waste into valuable resources. In addition, it generates a host of environmental, financial, and social benefits. Materials like glass, metal, plastics, and paper are collected, separated and sent to facilities that can process them into new materials or products.

Recycling is one of the best environmental success stories of the late 20th century. Recycling, including composting, diverted 79 million tons of material away from landfills and incinerators in 2005, up from 34 million tons in 1990. By 2002, almost 9,000 curbside collection programs served roughly half of the American population. Curbside programs, along with drop-off and buy-back centers, resulted in a diversion of about 32 percent of the nation's solid waste in 2005.

Benefits of Recycling

- Conserves resources for our children's future.
- Prevents emissions of many greenhouse gases and water pollutants.
- Saves energy.
- Supplies valuable raw materials to industry.
- Creates jobs.
- Stimulates the development of greener technologies.
- Reduces the need for new landfills and incinerators.

Buying Recycled Products

There's more to recycling than setting out your recyclables at the curb. In order to make recycling economically feasible, we must buy recycled products and packaging. When we buy recycled products, we create an economic incentive for recyclable materials to be collected, manufactured, and marketed as new products. Buying recycled has both economic and environmental benefits. Purchasing products made from or packaged in recycled materials saves resources for future generations.

Composting

Another form of recycling is composting. Composting is the controlled biological decomposition of organic matter, such as food and yard wastes, into humus, a soil-like material. Composting is nature's way of recycling organic waste into new soil, which can be used in vegetable and flower gardens, landscaping, and many other applications.

Benefits of Composting

- Keeps organic wastes out of landfills.
- Provides nutrients to the soil.
- Increases beneficial soil organisms (e.g., worms and centipedes).
- Suppresses certain plant diseases.
- Reduces the need for fertilizers and pesticides.
- Protects soils from erosion.
- Assists pollution remediation.

Household Hazardous Waste

Common household items such as paints, cleaners, oils, batteries, and pesticides contain hazardous components. One way to help determine if your household waste has hazardous components is to read the labels on products. Labels that read "danger," "warning," "caution," "toxic," "corrosive," "flammable," or "poison" identify products that might contain hazardous materials. Leftover portions of these products are called household hazardous waste (HHW). These products, if mishandled, can be dangerous to your health and the environment.

Although we cannot completely stop using hazardous products, we can make sure that leftovers are managed properly. The best way to handle HHW is to reduce the amount initially generated by giving leftover products to someone else to use. Although federal laws allow the disposal of HHW in the trash, many communities have collection programs for HHW to reduce the potential harm posed by these chemicals. These programs ensure the safe disposal of HHW in facilities designed to treat or dispose of hazardous waste. More than 3,000 HHW collection programs exist in the United States.