

Recycling and You

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Recycling Process



- Collecting and processing secondary materials, manufacturing recycled-content products, and then purchasing recycled products creates a circle or loop that ensures the overall success and value of recycling.

Step 1. Collection and Processing

Collecting recyclables varies from community to community, but there are four primary methods: curbside, drop-off centers, buy-back centers, and deposit/refund programs.

Regardless of the method used to collect the recyclables, the next leg of their journey is usually the same. Recyclables are sent to a materials recovery facility to be sorted and prepared into marketable commodities for manufacturing. Recyclables are bought and sold just like any other commodity, and prices for the materials change and fluctuate with the market.

Step 2. Manufacturing

Once cleaned and separated, the recyclables are ready to undergo the second part of the recycling loop. More and more of today's products are being manufactured with total or partial recycled content. Common household items that contain recycled materials include newspapers and paper towels; aluminum, plastic, and glass soft drink containers; steel cans; and plastic laundry detergent bottles. Recycled materials also are used in innovative applications such as recovered glass in roadway asphalt (glassphalt) or recovered plastic in carpeting, park benches, and pedestrian bridges.

Step 3. Purchasing Recycled Products

Purchasing recycled products completes the recycling loop. By "buying recycled," governments, as well as businesses and individual consumers, each play an important role in making the recycling process a success. As consumers demand more environmentally sound products, manufacturers will continue to meet that demand by producing high-quality recycled products.

Identifying Recycled-Content Products



- Product labels can be confusing to consumers interested in buying recycled because of the different recycling terminology used. The following definitions might help clarify any uncertainty regarding manufacturers' claims.
- **Recycled-content products** are made from materials that would otherwise have been discarded. Items in this category are made totally or partially from material destined for disposal or recovered from industrial activities—like aluminum soda cans or newspaper. Recycled-content products also can be items that are rebuilt or remanufactured from used products such as toner cartridges or computers.

Identifying Recycled-Content Products



- **Postconsumer content** refers to material from products that were used by consumers or businesses and would otherwise be discarded as waste. If a product is labeled "recycled content," the rest of the product material might have come from excess or damaged items generated during normal manufacturing processes—not collected through a local recycling program.
- **Recyclable products** can be collected and remanufactured into new products after they've been used. These products do not necessarily contain recycled materials and only benefit the environment if people recycle them after use. Check with your local recycling program to determine which items are recyclable in your community.

Recycling Facts and Figures



- In 1999, recycling and composting activities prevented about 64 million tons of material from ending up in landfills and incinerators. Today, this country recycles 28 percent of its waste, a rate that has almost doubled during the past 15 years.
- While recycling has grown in general, recycling of specific materials has grown even more drastically: 42 percent of all paper, 40 percent of all plastic soft drink bottles, 55 percent of all aluminum beer and soft drink cans, 57 percent of all steel packaging, and 52 percent of all major appliances are now recycled.
- Twenty years ago, only one curbside recycling program existed in the United States, which collected several materials at the curb. By 1998, 9,000 curbside programs and 12,000 recyclable drop-off centers had sprouted up across the nation. As of 1999, 480 materials recovery facilities had been established to process the collected materials.

Opportunities



- For recycling to work, everyone has to participate in each phase of the loop. From government and industry, to organizations, small businesses, and people at home, every American can make recycling a part of their daily routine.

Citizens



- *Recycle at home.* Find out if there is a recycling program in your community. If so, participate in the program by separating and putting out your recyclables for curbside pickup or taking them to your local drop-off or buy-back center.
- *Shop smarter.* Use products in containers that can be recycled in your community and items that can be repaired or reused. Also, support recycling markets by buying and using products made from recycled materials.
- *Recycle on the Go!* Look for recycling places in public spaces. If you can't find a recycling place, ask the responsible authority to look into installing one so you can recycle on the go.

What is Recycling?



- Recycling is a process designed to collect, re-make, and reuse materials instead of throwing them away.
- Recycling also keeps waste and materials away from *landfills* (areas where waste are deposited and then covered with land)
- Helps reduce the pollution that may result from waste disposal.

3 R's of Recycling



- REDUCE: to use less
- REUSE: to put back into use without changing
- Recycle: to put back into use with changing



What Can Be Recycled?



- PAPER – newspaper, magazines, etc.
- CARDBOARD - boxes
- ALUMINUM – cans
- PLASTIC – bottles
- GLASS - bottles

What Can You Do to Help?



- Look to buy products that have already been recycled
- Reuse as many items as possible before discarding them
- Recycle all items that are able to be recycled

