

New York State Department of Environmental Conservation
Division of Solid & Hazardous Materials
Bureau of Waste Reduction & Recycling

Reuse It Or Lose It!

INTRODUCTION

Sit back and think about what you've tossed in the trash today. How much of it was necessary? Could some of it have been reused or avoided altogether? It is estimated that each of us generates approximately five pounds of garbage per day. It doesn't just disappear, and contrary to popular belief, very little of it will degrade in a landfill.



Many of the things we throw away could be used again or recycled into new products. Reducing, reusing, recycling and composting materials reduces waste disposal costs and problems, conserves natural resources and saves valuable landfill space. Efforts to reduce and recycle waste materials are very important and we should all participate by purchasing only what we need and saving and sorting recyclable material (glass, metals, papers, plastics, etc.) for collection and ultimate use in the making of new products. These forms of solid waste management will be mentioned throughout this manual as in many cases, they are closely related to the primary focus of this guide, which is **REUSE**.

REUSE, DEC's second solid waste management priority after reduction is easy-it can take place entirely in your home or in the places you routinely frequent. For instance, using a container designed to hold sandwiches many times, or finding a new use for a glass jar, such as a holder of coins, are two good examples of reuse. Reuse also does not incur the costs of recycling in energy and dollars.



Many of our landfills are reaching full capacity or closing, and all components of our environment, air, water, as well as open spaces are increasingly threatened. We're all coming to realize that we can no longer afford for out of sight to mean out of mind. The time is right for us all to alter wasteful attitudes and lifestyles. Actually, with minimal effort, we can all help to solve our current solid waste disposal problems. Start by reusing waste as much as possible. Each time you reuse a product, a new one does not have to be manufactured and ultimately disposed of.

LET'S GET STARTED...

The easiest way to reuse materials that would otherwise go into the trash is to keep and reuse them for their original purposes. Here are some suggestions:

- (Seek out a store that uses refillable milk containers.
- (Repair broken or worn items such as appliances, mend shoes, reupholster furniture and patch clothing.
- (Give your unwanted possessions away. Even if you no longer have use for materials, someone else probably does. Community centers, church and civic organizations, day care facilities as well as friends and neighbors are all possible recipients. What you give away can range from books and eyeglasses to old furniture and broken but repairable appliances. Magazines are greatly appreciated in doctors' offices,



nursing homes or anywhere that people might appreciate a little light reading. Give children's clothes and toys to families with younger children or look for places where possible recipients may be found. Post a note on the local supermarket bulletin board offering free goods or consider a children's hospital, homeless shelters and the Salvation Army.

- (When you've determined that the item can't possibly be reused for its original purpose (don't be hasty to jump to this conclusion!), use a bit of imagination. You will soon find that much of what you previously considered trash is a valuable resource.

IN THE HOME

When most of us think of where the largest portion of our household solid waste accumulates, we think of the kitchen. Although this may be true, the kitchen is also a great place to put your reusables to work. Here's a list of only a few of the many possibilities.

- , Don't throw away useable food. Use old bread for croutons, crumbs, stuffing or French toast. Grate old cheese to sprinkle as topping. Use other leftovers in stir fries, stews, soups, meat loaves and omelets. Try having a leftover potluck dinner with a few friends. Remember your grandparents' attitude of *waste not, want not*, they knew what they were doing all along!

, Make sure to use a product completely. For example, store catsup and sauces upside down when almost empty to get the last drops out of the bottom or add warm water to the bottle, shake and stir into the same dishes mentioned above.

HINTS:



Buy in bulk - but only as much as you or a group will use.

Purchase food, especially dry food (eg., grain, pasta) in large quantities.

Get laundry soap, tooth paste and shampoo in the "jumbo" size.

Food co-ops are still a good way to buy in bulk and save money.

, Use old pots and pans for baking trays, mixing bowls or pet dishes.

, Another party hose idea is to hang potatoes or onions inside them. This will allow air to circulate so fewer will spoil.

, Put plastic lids under greasy bottles and coffee cans to prevent shelf staining. Many plastic lids are also a perfect size to cover the cut half of a grapefruit and keep it fresh.

, Buy reusable mesh coffee filters rather than disposable paper filters.



, Seal packages of dry goods such as potato chips with old clothespins.

, Bring home your purchases in reusable bags.

, Keep a sponge and towel near your roll of paper towels or put paper towels out of easy reach to insure that you only use paper towels as a last resort.

, Use empty potato chip bags to shake pieces of meat or fish in flour or bread crumbs.

, Use plates from frozen dinners for picnics or as dishes not to be returned, such as those given to neighbors or a bake sale. Try storing your own frozen dinner using leftovers.

- , Use yogurt, dip, and cream cheese containers to store individual portions of gelatin or pudding in the refrigerator for snacks or in a lunch pack. Cookies and chips won't get crushed in these containers either.
- , Reuse squeeze bottles formerly containing edibles, (no cleaning products, etc., please!) as basters, creamers or for a lemon spritz in tea.
- , Buy refillable containers where they're offered and if not, tell your local store manager you'd prefer them.
- , Save margarine and similar tubs for kitchen storage needs. They are durable, versatile, they save you money and are just as practical as the plastic storage containers sold in stores. (But don't microwave in these containers unless the plastic says "microwavable safe").
- , Don't limit what you store to just food. Former food holders can be used for storing buttons, sewing tools and screws. Use your imagination!



A FEW MORE TIPS AROUND THE HOUSE

Don't be lulled into a false sense of security when you see the word "degradable." Remember that much solid waste ends up in a landfill where air, sunlight or microorganisms, needed to break down materials may be absent. Do all that you can to keep trash out of landfills for as long as possible. Whenever possible, buy products that have refillable containers.

HINTS :

Avoid disposables. It is tempting to use disposable goods such as eating utensils for lunches or picnics, but fight the urge!

Soon you will find that it is just as easy to carry reusable dishes, mugs, thermoses, napkins, silverware and sandwich containers.

It can be cheaper too!

Don't forget to carry this rule beyond lunches... When traveling, bring reusable shavers,





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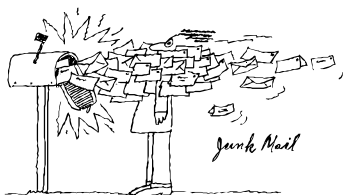
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- < Here's a tip in source reduction: Stop Junk Mail. Have your name removed from unwanted catalogues, advertisements, etc. Write to:



Direct Marketing Association
P.O. Box 9008
Farmingdale, NY 11735-9008

- < Tired of those pre-approved credit card applications, call one of the following to get your name off those lists:

Experian (formerly TRW) 800-353-0809
Trans Union 800-680-7293

Plastics

We are bombarded by plastic for its superior storing abilities. Plastic is leakproof, airtight, durable, moldable, lightweight, retains and resists heat and cold and can be transparent. Plastics are presently somewhat more limited in their recyclability than paper. Some plastics are easier to recycle than others and are coded to identify their compositions, it is especially important to make the most of their reuse potential. Although they may ultimately reach the waste stream, even a one-time detour can be helpful in waste reduction.

- # Shopping bags make up a large portion of the plastic in our waste stream. Why not bring your own reusable shopping bag (available at many supermarkets) to stores and explain why you're doing so? Spread your concern about solid waste. This practice will avoid bag accumulation in your home.
- # For those bags you already have, reuse small ones for sandwich storage and larger ones to line wastepaper baskets. Give extra bags to small, tight-budget businesses or a Salvation Army clothes store.
- # Turn a non-returnable 1, 2, and 3-liter plastic bottle into a funnel (use in home, or car) by cutting off the top half. With the remainder, separate the clear portion from opaque parts, turn clear portion upside down and insert into opaque base. Now you have a mini terrarium.
- # Use plastic bread bags to keep children's feet dry inside wet shoes or to slip on overshoes more easily. Keep a pair for yourself in the car for those days when you get caught in the rain with your favorite shoes on.

- # Rather than buy refreezable "ice" containers for your picnic coolers, or for camping, use empty plastic bottles. Mouthwash bottles are perfect; filled with water they are reusable in your freezer over and over, and when they thaw out you've got cold drinking or washing water.

Glass

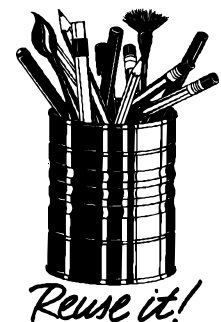
Unlike paper and plastic, container glass is totally and perpetually recyclable, yet only a fraction of it is recycled. Most glass needs to be color sorted for recycling. Before recycling, however, glass jars can be very practical for in-home storage of just about anything as they're water and air tight. Here are some suggestions.

- , Turn a pickle jar into a cookie jar or punch holes in the top of a small jar to create a shaker for spices like cinnamon, salt or grated cheese. A jar with a punctured lid will also make a great air freshener if filled with spices or potpourri.
- , Keep your bits and pieces or change in jars and know at a glance what's inside.
- , Use a large, attractive jar as a goldfish bowl.

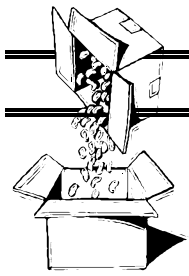
Metals

Often we think of recycling as the only answer to our solid waste problems. Metals are also endlessly recyclable: it takes 95 percent less energy to recycle aluminum than it does to process it from ore and steel is the most recycled material in the world. Before you recycle, however, consider reuse as the alternative that uses no resources except your imagination!

- < Aluminum Foil-be sure to reuse it.
- < Other Metals-Empty cans can be used as canisters, pencil holders, cookie cutters, muffin/cupcake molds, or measuring cups.
- < Use a tuna can with both top and bottom removed to cook a neat poached egg.



Get Creative - Reuse can satisfy your natural urge to construct, work with your hands and conserve. Some people have gone so far as to build houses with bottles. Most of us won't go this far, but with a little imagination and energy we can get creative with reusable items!



SOME MORE IDEAS

- # Freeze water in an empty aspirin or other small bottle as a cold compress.
- # Use a plastic bottle filled with warm water as a bed warmer.

- # Use a burnt out light bulb inside a sock for darning.

- # Use a necktie as a case for long, thin items such as an umbrella or use it to construct a change purse. Add a previously saved buckle to make a tie into colorful, casual belt.

- # Decorate jars of different sizes to create a homemade cannister.

- # Nail an old strip of shag carpet to a small leftover piece of wood to make a shoe shining brush.

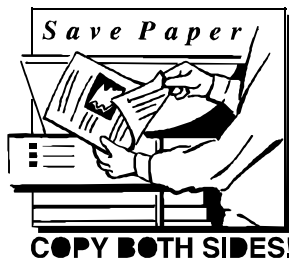
- # Use old toothbrushes to scrub hard to reach places, such as plumbing fixtures.

- # Cut a hole in the top of an oatmeal container to make a yarn dispenser.

- # Use a plastic grocery bag as a great litter bag for your car by looping it over your gearshifter.

SOME TIPS FOR REUSE AT THE OFFICE

Start a paper recycling program-call DEC's Bureau of Waste Reduction and Recycling or your DEC Regional Office-they will be happy to help you.



- ! Make two-sided copies and thereby cut down paper bulk and waste by half.
- ! Use one-sided scrap paper for draft documents.
- ! Circulate memos instead of making numerous copies.
- ! Save and reuse inter-office envelopes.

- ! Reduce mailings at work and whenever possible by using two-way envelopes.

- ! Replace colored legal pads with white; white paper is more usable and marketable for recycling as is separated computer paper.

- ! Reuse Styrofoam peanuts.
- ! Bring reusable dishes, mugs and utensils to work.

JUST FOR KIDS

Kids can be terrific engineers of reuse. Giving them free reign over your discarded papers, cardboard, scraps and packaging keeps them entertained, exercises their creativity, saves money and supplies and gives them something to call their own.

If you don't have children, just call your local elementary school or day care center and offer items useful for craft projects. They'll more than likely be glad to receive them.

It is unlikely that you'll have to suggest ideas to children on what to construct; they'll probably have ideas of their own. However, here are some projects to try: (Always use safety precautions, of course!)

- < Have a puppet show! Use a cardboard box for a stage, create a fabric scrap curtain, make glove or sock puppets and use an old sheet or tablecloth as a backdrop.
- < Use milk cartons covered in colorful paper to make lightweight building blocks. Use cookie, cracker, cereal, etc. boxes for a variety of sizes.
- < Construct a train from a can and a small box. Use bottle tops or sewing thread spools for wheels and other cans and boxes for cars, Remember to keep small objects away from young children.
- < Make a cracker box or lumber scrap village.
- < Create a more durable toy such as a doll house or play furniture from corrugated boxes.

OUTDOOR REUSE AND RECYCLING TIPS



The same rules apply indoors as outdoors -Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, Compost. You can find many new ways to reuse items in your own backyard:

- i Use empty jugs for watering cans or funnels.
- i Use old kitchen utensils for gardening tools.

- i Use bits and pieces (bottle tops, plastic bread tabs, broken pot pieces) as draining stones in flower pots.
- i Use egg cartons to grow seedlings. Return pots and trays from nursery-bought seedlings to place of purchase after planting.
- i Cut off the top of milk cartons or jugs and use the bottoms for planters.
- i Use neckties and other strips of cloth to tie plants in your vegetable garden. They'll hold them up but won't cut into plants the way string will. Ties are great for tying tomatoes which get top heavy.
- i Kneel on a large piece of cardboard or an old shower curtain to do garden work or to work under cars. This will also make your yard work clothes last longer and save your knees!
- i When mowing the yard, leave the clippings on the lawn. This eliminates raking, bagging, and removing and serves as a fertilizer. This is more important than you may think. Up to 20 percent of the solid waste we put in landfills is yard waste which is completely biodegradable outside landfills,

Hints:

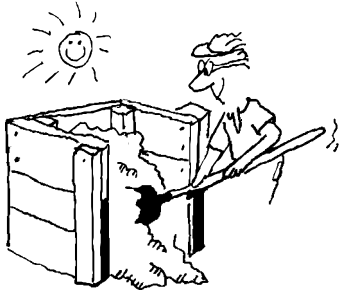
Borrow or rent things you seldom use - power tools, garden equipment, etc. This will save storage space, too.

Try starting a neighborhood association tool library - everyone who pays dues has free access to tools.

Compost

Compost is a dark, crumbly, earthy-smelling mixture that consists mostly of decayed organic matter. Composting is a simple, natural process, nature's way of recycling nutrients and returning them to the soil to be used again. **By taking advantage of this natural recycling process, you can help lighten the load of waste that would otherwise go to a landfill.**

Compost is used for fertilizing and conditioning soil. It can be made from materials that most households throw out, like:





Playgrounds can have swings and other structures as well as a rubber playground surface from used tires.

Tires can be used to manufacture shoe soles and insoles, floor mats, bumpers and sandals.

Tires can be used in asphalt (so can glass, by the way) to form a longer lasting road surface. The asphalt is very useful in mending or sealing cracks and resists cracking itself. This asphalt is flexible and performs optimally with a large volume of traffic.

If not severely worn, tires can undergo a retreading process and be used again.

Support efforts to recycle, retread, and reuse tires. Also partake in a little reduction by purchasing the most durable tires available and maintaining them.

AND FURTHERMORE...

Businesses are recognizing public environmental concern. One innovative idea is the remanufacturing of cars and car parts, appliances, and power tools. These items are disassembled, parts are replaced, updated and reassembled, saving the consumer and producer money, energy and raw materials. Combinations of recycled plastics can create "plastic lumber" which is long lasting, strong and can be nailed and sawed. It is ideal for uses where wood might rot or splinter. And best of all, it's recycled and recyclable. Trees are spared and waste is reduced. You can support corporations in these and all efforts to reduce waste. Technology still has a long way to go, but we're getting there.

Another innovative idea from the private sector is **The Millennium Exchange**. Often one industry's waste product is another one's raw material, so why not trade? Examples of traded materials are sawdust, acids, plastics, rubbers and waxes. For more information contact:

The Millennium Exchange, Ltd.

P.O. Box 2171

Annapolis, MD 21404

Phone: 410 280-2080

Fax: 410 280-0025

E-Mail: mmex.com



A FINAL WORD

The ideas presented in this brochure only touch upon a few of the multitude of ways in which you can reduce solid waste and household expenses through reuse. The important thing is to shift away from a throw-away mentality. Once you do this, your mind becomes open to all kinds of possible ways to reuse what you might otherwise have thrown away.

A few reminders:

- < Look for the term - Post-consumer on packaging and products and try to buy the highest percentage of post-consumer content.
- < Purchase products with minimal packaging.
- < Purchase packaging and products that are compatible with your communities recycling program. Call us if you do not know your local recycling coordinator.
- < Most reuse techniques are not at all inconvenient and are actually easier and cheaper than replacement.
- < One person's trash is another's treasure, so share; you may also find value in your own trash if you re-examine it before you dispose of it.

We've saved in times of crisis before, such as during economic depressions and wars. Let's get together and help solve this solid waste crisis by changing our behavior and spreading the word...

REUSE

If you have any question about waste reduction, reuse or recycling, or any ideas to help reduce, reuse, recycle, compost or Buy Recycled, contact:

New York State Department of Environmental Conservation
Division of Solid & Hazardous Materials
Bureau of Waste Reduction and Recycling
625 Broadway, Albany, NY 12233-7253
(518) 402-8704

E-mail us at: dshmwrr@gw.dec.state.ny.us

Our website is: <http://www.dec.ny.us/website/dshm/redrecy>