

## *Everyday Environmental Stewardship*



### **Recycling**

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### **Key issues:**

Responsible Use of Waste

### **Stewardship Opportunity**

Preventing Further Exhaustion of Earth's Resources

The Earth does not have an endless supply of raw materials. Unfortunately, modern consumerism does not take this fact into consideration. The average American consumer will throw out 1,602 pounds of trash per year, making the United States the largest producer of trash in the world. With consumerism and population continuing to grow, it is now more important than ever that we recycle.

Recycling is by no means a new concept. Humans have been doing it for centuries, although most recycling took place during times of war and recession. However, recycling has recently become much easier and widespread, thanks to new technologies, new methods of transportation, and awareness campaigns.

When resources are recycled, there is less demand for exhuming raw materials from the Earth. This means that more natural landscapes can remain untouched and pristine. Recycling saves municipalities money. Some people disagree with this statement because the process of recycling is more costly than dumping all waste into a landfill. This is true, but municipalities make that money back and more when they sell the recycled materials to manufacturers. On average, it costs a city \$30/ton to recycle trash compared to \$50/ton to send it to the landfill, and \$65-\$75/ton to incinerate. A recycling center in Wellesley makes about \$800,000 every year from selling recycled materials that its residents separate. Keep in mind that the more categories you sort yourself, the less your municipality has to do and the more money it saves.



While not all towns recycle, 4 in 5 Americans have stated that they are willing to separate their garbage into different recyclable categories. This is great news for the environment, and a reason to prompt your community to initiate recycling if it does not do so now.

Here are examples of the many categories that your recyclables are sorted into after they are taken from your curb:

**Metals:** Aluminum, Copper, Metal/Light Iron.

**Household Recycling:** Boxboard and Chipboard, Brown Paper Bags, Cardboard and Corrugated Cartons, Mixed Office Paper, Mixed Paper, Newspapers, Refundable

Containers, Glass (Brown, Green, Clear), Steel/Tinned Cans, Plastic Bottles, Plastic Non-Bottles, Plastic Bags, Aluminum Foil and Trays, and Aluminum Cans.

In addition to recycling, some items that cannot be recycled, but have other uses or are two hazardous to put into landfills are:

**Special/Hazardous: Appliances**

(Dishwashers, Air Conditioners, etc.), Automotive Batteries, Computers and Monitors, Fluorescent Bulbs, Paint, Propane Tanks, Tires, Waste Oil, Cell Phones, Electronic Media, Household Batteries, and Ink Cartridges.

Some of these items can be very harmful if they are incinerated (where they can enter the air) or if they are placed in landfills (where they can taint water supplies if the landfill is not properly sealed).



Because there are so many categories, many municipalities do not have the time or resources to sort all items into their proper place. If you feel like your town is one of these, feel free to take your garbage to a nearby recycling center (most towns either have one in them or adjacent to them) and sort it yourself there. The Earth will thank you.



Another way to dispose of waste properly is through composting. Many items that biodegrade within several months are thrown away and placed in landfills. Every year, the average American throws out about 1,200 pounds of organic garbage that can be composted. This is not necessary because biodegradable waste can be put to good use for both industrial and residential agriculture. Compost also prevents the need for artificial fertilizers, which are very polluting and can cause eutrophication when used

in excess. If you are a gardener, then you are encouraged to set up your own compost for free, nutrient-rich soil. Some items that are compostable: yard trimmings, leaves, and most foods.

Although every town conducts recycling differently, it is important that you understand how your particular town does so. If they have curb side pick up, make sure you understand all the categories of recyclables before you put your trash on the curb. If your town does not recycle, you are encouraged to find your nearest recycling center and drop off recyclables there. Also, it is your responsibility as a consumer to purchase items that can be easily recycled. For example, rather than buying juice boxes that are made of cardboard covered in aluminum and plastic (they exist), instead purchase a simple plastic bottle.