

Strategies for Reuse.

Source: EPA website: <http://www.epa.gov/osw/wycd/catbook/the12.htm>

When evaluating the types of strategies to incorporate in order to reduce the amount solid waste disposed of; major waste reduction strategies are source reduction, reuse, recycling, and composting. Reusing items is a way to stop waste at the source because it delays or avoids that item's entry into the waste collection and disposal system. Some strategies for reuse include:

#1. Consider Reusing Products:

Many products are designed to be used more than once. Reusable products and containers often result in less waste. This helps reduce the cost of managing solid waste and often conserves materials and resources. (Remember, reusable containers for food must be carefully cleaned to ensure proper hygiene.)

- A sturdy mug or cup can be washed and used time and again. Many people bring their own mugs to work, meetings, and conferences.
- Sturdy and washable utensils and tableware can be used at home and for picnics, outdoor parties, potlucks, and at work.
- At work, see if "recharged" cartridges for laser printers, copiers, and fax machines are available. They not only reduce waste, but also typically save money.
- Cloth napkins, sponges, or dishcloths can be used around the house. These can be washed over and over again.
- Look for items that are available in refillable containers. For example, some bottles and jugs for beverages and detergents are made to be refilled and reused, either by the consumer or the manufacturer.
- When possible, use rechargeable batteries to help reduce garbage and keep toxic metals found in some batteries out of the waste stream. Another alternative is to look for batteries with reduced toxic metals.
- When using single-use items, remember to take only what is needed. For example, take only one napkin or ketchup packet if more are not needed.
- Remember, if your goal is to reduce solid waste, think about reusing.

#2. Maintain and Repair Durable Products:

If maintained and repaired properly, products such as long-wearing clothing, tires, and appliances are less likely to wear out or break and will not have to be thrown out and replaced as frequently. Although durable products sometimes cost more initially, their extended life span may offset the higher cost and even save money over the long term.

- Consider long-lasting appliances and electronic equipment with good warranties. Check reports for products with a record of high consumer satisfaction and low breakdown rates. Also, look for those products that are easily repaired.
- Keep appliances in good working order. Follow manufacturers' suggestions for proper operation and maintenance.
- High-quality, long-lasting tires for cars, bicycles, and other vehicles are available. Using them reduces the rate at which tires are replaced and disposed of. Also, to extend tire life, check tire pressure once a month, follow the manufacturer's recommendations for upkeep, and rotate tires routinely. In addition, retread and remanufactured tires can reduce tire waste.

- Mend clothes instead of throwing them away. Where possible, repair worn shoes, boots, handbags, and briefcases.
- Whenever intended for use over a long period of time, choose furniture, luggage, sporting goods, toys, and tools that will stand up to vigorous use.
- Consider using low-energy fluorescent light bulbs rather than incandescent ones. They'll last longer, which means fewer bulbs are thrown out, and cost less to replace over time.

#3. Reuse Bags, Containers, and other items:

Many everyday items can have more than one use. Before discarding bags, containers, and other items, consider if it is hygienic and practical to reuse them. Reusing products extends their lives, keeping them out of the solid waste stream longer. Adopt the ideas that work for you, add some of your own, and then challenge others in your school, office, and community to try these ideas and to come up with others.

- Reuse paper and plastic bags and twist ties. If it's practical, keep a supply of bags on hand to use on the next shopping trip, or take a string, mesh, or canvas tote bag to the store. When a reusable bag is not on hand and only one or two items are being purchased, consider whether you need a bag at all.
- Reuse scrap paper and envelopes. Use both sides of a piece of paper for writing notes before recycling it. Save and reuse gift boxes, ribbons, and larger pieces of wrapping and tissue paper. Save packaging, colored paper, egg cartons, and other items for reuse or for arts and crafts projects at day-care facilities, schools, youth facilities, and senior citizen centers.
- Find other uses or homes for old draperies, bedding, clothing, towels, and cotton diapers. Then cut up what's left for use as patchwork, rags, doll clothes, rag rugs, or other projects.
- Reuse newspaper, boxes, packaging "peanuts," and "bubble wrap" to ship packages. Brown paper bags are excellent for wrapping parcels.
- Wash and reuse empty glass and plastic jars, milk jugs, coffee cans, dairy tubs, and other similar containers that otherwise get thrown out. These containers can be used to store leftovers as well as buttons, nails, and thumbtacks. An empty coffee can make a fine flower pot. (See [The Nine Lives of a Peanut Butter Jar, Part I](#), and [The Nine Lives of a Peanut Butter Jar, Part II](#))
- Turn used lumber into birdhouses, mailboxes, compost bins, or other woodworking projects.

CAUTION: Do not reuse containers that originally held products such as motor oil or pesticides. These containers and their potentially harmful residues should be discarded (following manufacturers' instructions on the label) as soon as they are empty. When you no longer have a use for a full or partially full container, take it to a community household hazardous waste collection center. Also, never store anything potentially harmful in containers designed for food or beverages. Always label containers and store them out of the reach of children and pets.

#4. Borrow, Rent, or Share Items Used Infrequently

Seldom-used items, like certain power tools and party goods, often collect dust, rust, take up valuable storage space, and ultimately end up in the trash. Consider renting or borrowing these items the next time they're needed. Infrequently used items also might be shared among neighbors, friends, or family. Borrowing, renting, or sharing items saves both money and natural resources.

- Rent or borrow party decorations and supplies such as tables, chairs, centerpieces, linens, dishes, and silverware.

- Rent or borrow seldom-used audiovisual equipment.
- Rent or borrow tools such as ladders, chain saws, floor buffers, rug cleaners, and garden tillers. In apartment buildings or co-ops, residents can pool resources and form "banks" to share tools or other equipment used or needed infrequently. In addition, some communities have "tool libraries" where residents can borrow equipment as needed.
- Before discarding old tools, camera equipment, or other goods, ask friends, relatives, neighbors, or community groups if they can use them.
- Share newspapers and magazines with others to extend the lives of these items and reduce the generation of waste paper.

#5. Sell or Donate Goods Instead of Throwing Them Out

One person's trash is another person's treasure. Instead of discarding unwanted appliances, tools, or clothes; try to sell or donate them. Opting for used and "irregular" items is another good way to practice source reduction. Such products are often less expensive than new or "first-quality" items, and using them will keep them from being thrown away.

- Donate items to thrift stores or other organizations in need. Donors sometimes receive tax deductions. These organizations typically take everything from clothes and textiles to appliances and furniture. All should be clean and of respectable quality.
- Give hand-me-down clothes to family members, neighboring families, or the needy.
- Sell your secondhand items at fairs, bazaars, swap meets, garage sales or on the internet.
- Consider acquiring used clothing at thrift or consignment shops. The condition of used clothing in these stores is screened: clothes are typically laundered and cannot have tears or stains.
- Consider conducting a food or clothing drive to help others. Where appropriate, encourage area merchants to donate damaged goods or food items that are still edible to food banks, shelters, and other groups that care for the needy.