



Home & Environment

Household Waste Management Reuse

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In this Publication

- Reuse
- Purchasing Durable Items
- Repurposing
- Reassigning

Waste management is the collection, processing and disposal, or reuse of recyclable and non-recyclable materials. The ultimate goal of waste management is to reduce the amount of waste material that is deposited in landfills through recycling and/or reuse. Today the average American creates about 5 pounds of waste per day, half of which is recycled in some manner, leaving roughly 2.5 pounds of waste per day. The ultimate goal of waste management is to reduce the amount of waste that goes to landfills to the absolute minimum through recycling and/or reuse of all suitable materials.

If everyone who attended a sold out UK basketball game at Rupp Arena brought with them their trash that would be landfilled that day, it would weigh:
 $23,500 \text{ persons} \times 2.5 \text{ lbs/person} = 58,750 \text{ lbs}$

Reuse

Reuse is essentially any action that extends the life of a product and keeps it out of the waste system. The process of reusing an item can start even before you purchase it. Ask yourself what other uses or functions an item can have before you purchase it, and again before you decide to recycle or dispose of it. There are three ways to reuse items:

- Purchase durable items that can be used for a long time.
- Repurpose an item that has been used to its full extent for its primary purpose by using it for another purpose.
- Reassign to someone else an item that you no longer want or need.

Purchasing Durable Items

Purchasing durable items that can be used for a long time can save you money and reduce the amount of waste generated. One example of this concept is the replacement of one-time-use plastic bags by reusable grocery bags. Reusable bags can be found and purchased just about everywhere, from grocery store aisles to farmers markets. So, why all the hype over plastic bags? Each year billions of plastic bags are used



The 3 Rs are the foundations of waste management. The order is based on the impact each has on waste management.

Giving items to charity extends the life of the item, contributes to the well being and/or education of others, and in some cases the donation can be used as a tax write-off.

around the world. According to Reuseablebag.com, the average family uses approximately 60 plastic bags in just four trips to the grocery store, and of these bags only 1 to 3 percent are recycled. Some reports indicate that many plastic bags collected for recycling never actually get recycled. And if the bags do get recycled, the collection, transportation, and processing of these bags all require energy. Bags that are not recycled often end up as litter, clogging waterways and causing harm to animals. So, on your next shopping trip, remember to bring your own reusable bags. These bags are durable, hold more than paper or plastic bags, and can even save you money at some stores.

Ideas for reuse

- Avoid multiple purchases by buying high-quality goods that will last.
- Use cloth towels to clean up messes instead of paper towels.
- Purchase items in bulk and refill smaller containers for household use.
- Reuse food containers from take-out meals.

Repurposing

Repurposing can be as simple as using an old coffee can to store pens and pencils, to making a lampshade from broken glass bottles.

Ideas for repurposing

- Butter bowls, coffee cans and glass jars can be thoroughly washed and put to other uses. They are great for storing nails, buttons, crayons, markers, or other small items.
- Newspapers and magazines can be used for packing material and as gift wrap.
- Old clothes can be cut up and used as cleaning and polishing rags.
- Food jars can be used as candle holders.

- Items such as shoe boxes, paper towel tubes, glass jars and old socks can be used for arts and crafts projects at home, child care centers, or preschool programs. Even if you don't have children, you can check with a local center or program to see if they need items, and then separate those from your trash to drop off at a later time.

Reassigning

Reassigning encompasses buying used items, renting or borrowing items, and/or giving items to charity. Any one of these activities extends the life of the item and allows others to benefit from its use. Buying quality used items can save you money over buying new and has the added benefit of extending the product's life and keeping it from being disposed of unnecessarily. Find or buy used items at:

- Garage sales
- Thrift stores (such as Goodwill, Salvation Army)
- Your neighbors
- Auction and bartering websites

Renting or borrowing items allows for one item to be used by multiple people, extending its usefulness. Instead of purchasing a new item that you will occasionally use, see if a neighbor has one that you can borrow, and if they don't check with a local rental facility. There are a wide variety of items you can rent, such as:

- Table, chairs, and party supplies
- Lawn and garden equipment
- Tools and home improvement equipment

You can also trade items with neighbors and strangers. Swap parties are gatherings where everyone brings clothes or other items that are still usable. There is usually a theme or designated types of items that are to be brought and swapped, such as children's clothing, handbags and

shoes, or a free-for-all. Swap parties are a great way to exchange your unwanted items for something you can use, and it will cost you nothing. There are also websites that connect people that have an item they want to get rid of with people who want that item. One such example is [Freecycle.org](http://www.freecycle.org), which is a “gifting” website that connects people; there is no trading, just give what you don’t need and take what you do.

Giving items to charity extends the life of the item, contributes to the well being and/or education of others, and in some cases the donation can be used as a tax write-off. A few examples of items that could be contributed to charity instead of being disposed of are white goods, computers, cell phones, and excess paint.

- White goods are any type of home appliances. If your appliance is still in good working order, check with local charities to see if they accept donations. Before you donate white goods, you should:
 - Clean the appliance.
 - Gather all manuals and accessories to be included with the donation.
- If your computer is in good working order, contact your local school board or other charitable foundation for instructions on how to donate. Before you donate a computer take the following steps:
 - Gather installation disks, manuals, and peripherals.
 - Back up your data (video, photos, documents, music, and e-mail) to a separate computer or hard drive that will not be donated.

- Delete information from the hard drive using a program such as Darik’s Boot and Nuke (<http://www.dban.org/>) to prevent theft of private personal data that may be stored on the hard drive.
- Reinstall the operating system and any productivity software that came with the computer.
- You can donate your old **cell phones** to be reused. A program such as [Call2Recycle.org](http://www.call2recycle.org) resells donated cell phones and uses part of the funds to further its recycling programs and donates part to charities such as the Boys and Girls Club and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.
- You don’t have to dispose of your excess **paint**; you can donate it to a charity or mix leftover latex paint and use it for projects where color does not matter.

Reuse can take some thinking, planning, and work on your part, but the substantial benefits in cost and waste reduction make reuse worth it.

Sources

United States Environmental Protection Agency. 2009. Reduce & Reuse. Available at <http://www.epa.gov/osw/consERVE/rrr/reduce.htm> (accessed 9 Sep. 2009). US EPA: Washington, DC.

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