



## Follow the Rs:

## Reduce, Replace, Reuse, Recycle, Recover, Refuse and Reject, Rethink

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We are quickly running out of space. Each year, we generate millions of tons of trash in the form of wrappings, bottles, boxes, cans, grass clippings, furniture, clothing, phone books, and much, much, more.

Durable goods (tires, appliances, furniture) and nondurable goods (paper, certain disposable products, clothing) account for several million tons of the solid waste stream. Materials include glass, aluminum, plastics,

steel and other metals, and paper and paperboard. Yard trimmings such as grass clippings and tree limbs are also a substantial part of what we throw away. More than 30% of our waste is packaging materials.

Where does it all go? Some 85 % of our garbage is sent to landfills, where it can take from 100 to 400 years for things like cloth and aluminum to decompose. Glass has been found in perfect condition after 4,000 years in the earth!

Find out what you can do to help make a difference in our environment everyday! Whether you're at home, on the go, in the office, or at school, there are many opportunities to make a change.

## Reduce:

Reducing the amount of waste you produce is the best way to help the environment. There are lots of ways to do this. For example:

- Buy products that don't have too much packaging. Some products are wrapped in many layers of plastic and paperboard even though they don't need to be. You can also look for things that are packed in materials that don't require a lot of energy or resources to produce. Some products will put that information right on their labels.
- Instead of buying something you're not going to use very often, see if you can borrow it from someone. Cars use a large amount of energy and cause pollution. Some ways to reduce the environmental damage caused by cars include carpooling with friends, walking, taking the bus, or riding your bike instead of driving.
- Start a compost bin. Some people set aside a place in their yard where they can dispose of certain food and plant materials. Over time, the materials will break down through a natural process called decomposition. The compost is good for the soil in your yard and means that less garbage will go to the landfill.
- You can reduce waste by using a computer! Most newspapers and magazines are available online. Instead of buying the paper versions, you can find them on the Internet. Also remember that you should print out only what you need.

## Replace:

To substitute a thing that is broken or inefficient or lost or no longer working for another. To put in the place of another and switch seemingly equivalent items that can be interchanged:

- Use water-based paints instead of solvent-based paints,
- Use durable items instead of one-off disposable items (e.g. replace paper/plastic cups with mugs/glasses),
- Replace paper towels with hand-dryers or cloth towels,
- Choose environmentally friendly alternatives if

available, such as biodegradable cleaners and garbage bags, also use less toxic chemicals,

- Rent instead of buying equipment like copiers and computers to minimize unnecessary waste when systems need to be upgraded.

## Reuse:

- Bring cloth sacks to the store with you instead of taking home new paper or plastic bags. You can use these sacks again and again. You'll be saving some trees! Plastic containers and reusable lunch bags are great ways to take your lunch to school without creating waste.
- Coffee cans, shoeboxes, plastic food containers, and other types of containers people throw away can be used to store things or can become fun arts and crafts projects. Use your imagination!
- Don't throw out clothes, toys, furniture, and other things that you don't want anymore. Somebody else can probably use them. You can bring them to a centre that collects donations, give them to friends, or even have a yard sale.
- Use all writing paper on both sides.
- Use paper grocery bags to make book covers rather than buying new ones.
- Use silverware and dishes instead of disposable plastic utensils and plates.

## Recycle:

Many of the things we use every day, like paper bags, soda cans, and milk cartons, are made out of materials that can be recycled.

In some towns you can leave your recyclables in bins outside your home, and a truck will come and collect them regularly. Other towns have recycling centers where you can drop off the materials you've collected. Things like paper and plastic grocery bags, and plastic and aluminum cans and bottles can often be brought to the grocery store for recycling. Whatever your system is, it's important to remember to rinse out and sort your recyclables!

Recycled items are put through a process that makes it possible to create new products out of the materials from the old ones. Some materials such as aluminum and glass can be recycled indefinitely, as the process does not affect their structure. Other materials, such as paper, require a mixture of waste and raw material to manufacture a new product.

Many goods produced with recycled content will end up in the shops as ordinary household products, such as bin bags, stationery, furniture, or even filling for duvets and pillows. In addition to recycling the things you buy, you can help the environment by buying products that contain recycled materials. Many brands of paper towels, garbage bags, greeting cards, and toilet paper, to name a few examples, will tell you on their labels if they are made from recycled materials.

### Recover:

After collection, the residual waste is disposed of (either through landfill or incineration), the recyclables are remanufactured and/or energy is recovered (if energy is recovered from waste it is classed as recovery rather than disposal). To recover is a new technology that prepares and treats waste materials in order to generate energy. The energy produced by this special method is used as power. Energy can be recovered from waste either by direct waste incineration (typically mass burn incineration plants, taking unsorted waste) or by using waste as a fuel substitute (either directly or as a "refuse derived fuel").

The technology to burn waste has developed significantly over the past 50 years and incinerators are now much cleaner than they used to be. The energy released from burning the rubbish is often used to generate electricity. Even greater benefits can be gained by using the extra heat to heat nearby housing or offices.

### Refuse and Reject:

- ▶ Refuse disposable plastics! Disposable plastics are the greatest source of plastic pollution. Plastic bags, straws, bottles, utensils, lids, cups and so many others offer a small convenience but remain forever.
- ▶ Reject: you always have the choice. Do not buy anything you don't really need.

### Rethink.

It is ultimately up to us to really start thinking about what we buy, why we buy it and how we dispose of it.

