ecology center

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Facts about

Recycling and Waste

recycling facts

- Alameda County reduced its solid waste by 24 percent between 2000 and 2008, thanks in great part to stronger recycling programs. But paper is still 21 percent of its waste stream, plastic ten percent, metal four percent, and glass three percent. (StopWaste.org)

- Every 120 pounds of newspapers that are recycled spares a tree from heading to a paper mill. (Environment Canada)

- Recycling paper causes 35 percent less water pollution, and 74 percent less air pollution, than manufacturing the same amount of paper from virgin materials. (US EPA)

- Throwing away an aluminum soda can wastes as much energy as burning half its volume in gasoline. We still throw away enough aluminum cans in the U.S. to rebuild every commercial airplane in the country...every three months! (California Dept. of Conservation)

- Recycling aluminum cans saves 95 percent of the energy, and 97 percent of the water pollution, required to make new cans from aluminum ore. (Can Manufacturers Institute)

- Recycling a steel can saves 74 percent of the energy required to make the same amount of new steel. We already save enough energy by recycling steel in the United States to supply electricity to one-fifth of the nation's households. (Steel Recycling Institute)

- Recycling one glass bottle saves enough energy to run a hundred-watt light bulb for four hours. It also causes 20 percent less air pollution and 50 percent less water pollution than making a new bottle from raw materials. (San Jose State University)

- Every year, Californians save enough energy by recycling bottles and cans to power over half a million homes. (California Dept. of Conservation)

- "E-cycling" is taking off: Recyclers are already recovering more than 100 million pounds of materials from electronics every year. When you recycle your computer or cell phone, you keep toxic materials out of the air and water and reduce the need to mine and manufacture new materials. (US EPA)

- Recycling a ton of materials in a typical curbside recycling program conserves at least $187 worth of electricity, petroleum, natural gas, and coal, even after accounting for the energy used to collect and transport materials. (California Integrated Waste Management Board - CIWMB)

- Recycling a million desktop computers reduces greenhouse gas emissions equivalent to driving sixteen thousand passenger cars for a year. (US EPA)

- Recycling a hundred million cell phones recovers 7,500 pounds of gold. Mining the same amount of gold requires mining, moving, and processing twelve billion pounds of ore. (US EPA)

- There are as many as fifteen million jobs in recycling worldwide. As recycling expands, the "green-collar" economy gets stronger. In Berkeley, the Ecology Center has been providing curbside recycling services to residents since 1973. Our recycling crew diverts over 7,500 tons of glass, paper, plastic, and metal from the landfill every year.

factsheet

Facts about Recycling and Waste (continued)

Follow the Four Rs for Less Waste and a Better Environment

Reduce

The best way to create less waste is to buy less stuff. We save energy and materials when we buy fewer new things.

- Rent or borrow tools and equipment you don't use very often. Instead of owning a car, consider a car share program. Help others reduce by letting them know they can borrow your stuff, too!
- Reduce your junk mail: StopJunkMail.org and CatalogChoice.org are two great resources for getting your name off of mailing lists.
- Bring your own bag when shopping, and choose products with minimal or no packaging.
- Buy in bulk and bring your own containers to the store for food staples and body care at store that provide it.

Reuse

Reusing the stuff in our lives slows its journey down the waste stream. Avoiding single-use, disposable products stops that waste from piling up altogether.

- Reuse the packaging and containers that food and other products come in.
- Pass on books, magazines, and newspapers to friends.
- Discover the thrift stores in your area. Buying and donating used goods makes reuse a community effort.
- Choose products that are durable and can be repaired if they break. Repair skills can be fun to learn: Take a class or ask a friend to teach you how to fix and reuse your computer, sweater, or bicycle. Dry cleaners will often repair clothes, and cobblers will fix your shoes. Look around your community for the hidden reuse resources.

Recycle

When you can't reuse, recycle! Paper, plastic, glass, and metal needn't wind up in the landfill. It takes energy to sort, clean, and convert cans, bottles, and paper to new recycled products, but much less energy than starting with virgin materials. Air and water pollution impacts are also reduced significantly.

- Learn how your community recycles. Following the guidelines helps your recycling program do the most efficient and cost effective job possible to keep recyclables out of the landfill.
- Find the places in your community that accept electronics, batteries, fluorescent lightbulbs, used motor oil, and other harder-to-recycle items. Contact or visit the Ecology Center for help.
- Recycling only works if you buy recycled products, too. Look for labeling and choose recycled-content products. The Ecology Center has information to share about recycled products vendors.

Rot

Kitchen scraps, yard waste, food-soiled paper, and other organic material make up half the waste stream in Alameda County. Most Bay Area communities have adopted "green bin" pickups of these materials so they can be composted instead of landfilled. It's also easy and useful to compost at home.

- Build or buy a compost bin or a worm bin to turn your food scraps and yard trimmings into rich, fertile compost.
- Learn more about composting. The Ecology Center can answer questions and help you find classes that will turn you into a master composter. Visit us, online or in person, or call to find out more!