

Myths About Recycling

Myth: Recycling is hard.

As long as the community can provide adequate recycling opportunities and accessibility, recycling shouldn't be difficult. It is now easier than ever! Many communities accept commingled recycling so that you no longer need to do the sorting or removal of caps and labels.

Myth: Material placed in a landfill will decompose.

The design of landfills is to keep oxygen and moisture from flowing through them. Both of which are essential components of decomposition. Landfills are meant to bury trash, not break it down. This is to keep materials from contaminating ground water and soil. So recycling creates more space in landfills and reduces the chance of contamination getting into our soil and water.

Myth: Recycling just becomes more trash.

The EPA's response:

While it is true that contamination can render some materials unfit for recycling (such as food residue on paper products), recycling corporations work hard to find markets for materials that are recycled. With new technology to separate and salvage materials and emerging markets for these materials, recyclers often find it feasible to partner with their end users to identify opportunities for reuse. Some materials will eventually find their way to the landfill or incinerator simply because they should not have been recycled in the first place. Educating consumers about what can and cannot be recycled will help in reducing the amount of materials that eventually must be disposed as waste.

Myth: Any plastic product that has a number within the chasing arrows (triangle of arrows) is recyclable.

The plastics industry created the number system, or resin identification code in 1988 to differentiate the different types of plastic. The code does not mean that the material is recyclable or has been recycled. It simply is identifying the type of plastic.

Myth: Recycled bottles are just made into new bottles.

The EPA's response:

Recycled materials are reprocessed and turned into a variety of new products. Recycled



plastics are used in the production of toothbrushes, plastic construction timber and carpets, to name a few. Recycling allows for greater innovation when it comes to the manufacturing of new products. *Statistical Sources for the following myths came from NRC's Environmental Benefits Calculator, NRC's Recycling Economic Information Study, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Steel Recycling Institute, American Forest & Paper Association, BioCycle Magazine, Resource Recycling Magazine, American Plastics Council, Glass Packaging Institute, Aluminum Association, and WorldWatch Institute unless otherwise noted.*

Myth: There is plenty of landfill space, so why bother with recycling? Also, landfills are safe for the disposal of trash.

The National Recycling Coalition's response:

- The true value of recycling comes from preventing pollution and saving natural resources and energy, not landfill space.
- Recycling is largely responsible for averting the landfill crises.
- The number of landfills in the United States is steadily decreasing - from 8,000 in 1988 to 1,858 in 2001. The capacity, however, has remained relatively constant. New landfills are much larger than in the past.
- Liquid leachate (any liquid that moves through or drains from a landfill, existing in the landfill or from rain) is a risk for groundwater contamination near a site.
- Municipal solid waste landfills are the largest source of human-related methane emissions in the United States, accounting for about 34% of these emissions, which are a potent cause of global warming.

Myth: Recycling causes more pollution than it prevents.

The National Recycling Coalition's response:

- Recycling helps reduce our reliance on foreign oil by saving energy.
- A national recycling rate of 30% reduces greenhouse gas emissions as much as removing nearly 25 million cars from the road.
- In 2007, recycling is conservatively projected to save the **same** amount of energy used in 9 million homes (900 trillion BTUs).
- Brutal wars over natural resources, including timber and minerals, have killed or displaced more than 20 million people and are raising at least \$12 billion a year for rebels, warlords and repressive governments. Recycling eases the demand for the resources.
- In the U.S., processing minerals contributes almost half of all reported toxic emissions from industry, sending 1.5 million tons of pollution into the air and water each year. Recycling can significantly reduce these emissions.
- It takes 95% less energy to recycle aluminum than it does to make it from raw materials. Making recycled steel saves 60%, recycled newspaper 40%, recycled plastics 70% and recycled glass 40%. These savings far outweigh the energy created from byproducts of incineration and landfills.
- Mining is the world's most deadly occupation. On average, 40 coal workers are killed on the job each day, and many more are injured. Recycling reduces the need for mining.
- Tree farms and reclaimed mines are not ecologically equivalent to natural forests and ecosystems. Recycling prevents habitat destruction, loss of biodiversity, and soil erosion associated with logging and mining