

# Purchasing & Recycling Process



Collecting and processing secondary materials, manufacturing recycled-content products, and then purchasing recycled products creates a circle or loop that ensures the overall success and value.

Step 1. Collection and Processing Collecting recyclables varies from community to community, but there are four primary methods: curbside, drop-off centers, buy-back centers, and deposit/refund programs.

Regardless of the method used to collect the recyclables, the next leg of their journey is usually the same. Recyclables are sent to a materials recovery facility to be sorted and prepared into marketable commodities for manufacturing. Recyclables are bought and sold just like any other commodity, and prices for the materials change and fluctuate with the market.

Step 2. Manufacturing Once cleaned and separated, the recyclables are ready to undergo the second part of the recycling loop. More and more of today's products are being manufactured with total or partial recycled content. Common household items that contain recycled materials include newspapers and paper towels; aluminum, plastic, and glass soft drink containers; steel cans; and plastic laundry detergent bottles. Recycled materials also are used in innovative applications such as recovered glass in roadway asphalt (glassphalt) or recovered plastic in carpeting, park benches, and pedestrian bridges.

Step 3. Purchasing Recycled Products Purchasing recycled products completes the recycling loop. By "buying recycled," governments, as well as businesses and individual consumers, each play an important role in making the recycling process a success. As consumers demand more environmentally sound products, manufacturers will continue to meet that demand by producing high-quality recycled products. Learn more about recycling terminology and to find tips on identifying recycled products.

## Opportunities

For recycling to work, everyone has to participate in each phase of the loop. From government and industry, to organizations, small businesses, and people at home, every American can make recycling a part of their daily routine. Below are some ways in which businesses, local governments, and citizens can get involved:

### Businesses

- Visit the Web site for EPA's WasteWise program. <http://www.epa.gov/wastewise>
- Get involved with your local or state recycling organization. For a list of state organizations, visit the National Recycling Coalition's Web site. <http://www.nrc-recycle.org>
- Buy recycled-content products. Visit the Web site for EPA's Comprehensive Procurement Guidelines for lists of manufacturers of recycled-content products. Determining the percentage of recycled content to specify in product procurement can be a challenge, but the information is available. Consider the following steps as a guide:

"Read the label or product description in a catalog carefully. The wording on a label may state that the product contains 50% recycled content, 30% post-consumer. Look for the product that is manufactured from 50% virgin material and 50% recycled material, of which 30% is post-consumer recycled material.

## **Citizens**

- Recycle at home. Find out if there is a recycling program in your community. If so, participate in the program by separating and putting out your recyclables for curbside pickup or taking them to your local drop-off or buy-back center.
- Shop smarter. Use products in containers that can be recycled in your community and items that can be repaired or reused. Also, support recycling markets by buying and using products made from recycled materials.
- Recycle on the Go! Look for recycling places in public spaces. If you can't find a recycling place, ask the responsible authority to look into installing one so you can recycle on the go.
- Natural composting, or biological decomposition, began with the first plants on earth and has been going on ever since. As vegetation falls to the ground, it slowly decays, providing minerals and nutrients needed for plants, animals, and microorganisms. Mature compost, however, includes the production of high temperatures to destroy pathogens and weed seeds that natural decomposition does not destroy.
- Leftover household products that contain corrosive, toxic, ignitable, or reactive ingredients are considered to be "household hazardous waste" or "HHW." Products, such as paints, cleaners, oils, batteries, and pesticides, that contain potentially hazardous ingredients require special care when you dispose of them.

## **Recycling Facts and Figures**

- In 1999, recycling and composting activities prevented about 64 million tons of material from ending up in landfills and incinerators. Today, this country recycles 32 percent of its waste, a rate that has almost doubled during the past 15 years.
- While recycling has grown in general, recycling of specific materials has grown even more drastically: 50 percent of all paper, 34 percent of all plastic soft drink bottles, 45 percent of all aluminum beer and soft drink cans, 63 percent of all steel packaging, and 67 percent of all major appliances are now recycled.
- Twenty years ago, only one curbside recycling program existed in the United States, which collected several materials at the curb. By 2005, almost 9,000 curbside programs had sprouted up across the nation. As of 2005, about 500 materials recovery facilities had been established to process the collected materials.

## **Why Buy Recycled Products?**

- Quality products are available to meet almost any specifications.
- Unless you are buying recycled, you are not recycling.
- Recycling makes good economic sense.