



## Recycling 101

What is recycling? Recycling is placing items that can be made into new products or materials in the recycling bin or taking them to a drop-off center.

But, there's a little more to it than that.

Recycling is a three-step process. The first step is collection – that's when you put your recyclables into the bin or take them to a drop-off center. The second step is manufacturing – when the recyclables are processed into raw materials that are then manufactured into new products. The third step is buying recycled. You are not really recycling unless you are buying recycled-content products.

You have seen the recycling symbol , right? The three arrows represent steps that complete the recycling loop.

### Why should I recycle?

Recycling has many environmental benefits. It reduces the need to build landfills and incinerators. Recycling conserves natural resources as well as energy. Recycling reduces pollution caused by the extraction and processing of raw materials as well as the manufacturing of products using raw materials.

Recycling also has many economic benefits. First, recycling turns items that otherwise would become waste into valuable resources. Recyclables have value. The recyclables you place in the bin or take to the drop-off center end up on the market as commodities that are bought and sold.

Recyclables, in fact, make up an essential part of today's marketplace according to the 2001 "U.S. Recycling Economic Information Study." In the United States, the recycling and reuse industry consists of about 56,000 businesses that employ more than 1.1 million people. These businesses have an annual payroll of \$37 billion and gross more than \$236 billion in annual revenues.

Recycling is big business in South Carolina, too. The recycling industry has a \$6.5 billion annual impact

on the state's economy according to a 2006 study conducted by the College of Charleston's Department of Economics and Finance. "The Economic Impact of the Recycling Industry in South Carolina" study, commissioned by the S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC), shows that the recycling industry is directly responsible for more than 15,000 jobs, \$1.5 billion in annual personal income and \$69 million in tax revenue each year.

To learn more about why we should recycle, see the "FYI: Environmental Benefits of Recycling" fact sheet and the "FYI: Economic Benefits of Recycling" fact sheet.

### Recycling works.

Recycling, in fact, is one of the nation's best environmental success stories. Americans recycled about 82 million tons of municipal solid waste (MSW) in 2009 (the latest data available) – more than double the amount recycled in 1990 according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

South Carolinians recycled 1,063,521 tons of MSW in fiscal year (FY) 2010 (July 1, 2009 - June 30, 2010) and about 16 million tons of material since FY98. (To learn more about MSW, MSW recycling totals and MSW recycling goals, see the "FYI: Recycling 102" fact sheet.)

### What should I recycle?

The most common materials collected for recycling include cardboard boxes, newspapers, steel (fruit, vegetable, soup and other food) cans, aluminum cans, plastic bottles, glass bottles, lead-acid batteries (car and truck), electronics, tires, used motor oil and large appliances.

Some local programs also collect non-traditional items for recycling. These items may include cooking oil, antifreeze and paint.

## Where do I recycle?

South Carolina has almost 4.6 million residents and most have curbside recycling or recycling drop-off centers in their communities. Many South Carolinians also take advantage of recycling programs at work, school, state parks and welcome centers.

## What happens to my recyclables after I recycle them?

Well, they begin a circular journey. Here's the short version. The materials are collected and sorted at the curb, drop-off center or processing facility. They may be baled and sold for processing. Manufacturers purchase these processed materials and make them into new recycled-content products that they sell.

Here's where you come in again. You must buy recycled-content products to make it all work. (To learn more about buying recycled, see the "DO YOUR PART: Buying Recycled ... and Beyond" fact sheet.)

## What and where can I recycle?

If you don't know what or where you can recycle in your community, here's some help. Each of South

Carolina's 46 counties and some municipalities have a recycling coordinator who can answer your questions. Look in the telephone book for your public works director, solid waste director or recycling coordinator.

You also can call DHEC's Office of Solid Waste Reduction and Recycling (Office) at **1-800-768-7348** or visit [www.scdhec.gov/environment/lwm/recycle/counties.htm](http://www.scdhec.gov/environment/lwm/recycle/counties.htm) for information about local programs in the state.

## How can I start a recycling program?

Want to set up a program at your school, office or in your community? The Office can provide education and awareness programs and materials, technical assistance and grant funding. Please call **1-800-768-7348** or visit [www.scdhec.gov/recycle](http://www.scdhec.gov/recycle).

## R-E-C-Y-C-L-E. It begins with you and me.

Government, businesses, organizations, schools, colleges/universities and consumers each play an important role in making recycling work. The role can vary – from participating in collection programs, to making recycled-content products to buying those products. Regardless, everyone needs to do their part. Remember, it's just right to recycle.



Office of Solid Waste  
Reduction & Recycling  
**1-800-768-7348** ● [www.scdhec.gov/recycle](http://www.scdhec.gov/recycle)

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