



Recycling Myth Busters



Think you know everything about recycling? Think again. Below are some common recycling myths and the truths behind the tales.

Myth: You must clean your plastic or glass recyclables before you recycle them or they will be thrown away.

Recyclables will still be recycled if they are not rinsed, but some people prefer to clean recyclables to prevent odors if they store materials in their homes. Encourage people to empty their containers as much as possible but thoroughly cleaning them is not necessary.

Myth: Recyclables in Chicago go to landfills.

Recyclables from the City's Blue Carts and Drop-Off Centers are sent to three private, local sorting facilities. Each group of recyclables is separated and packaged into a 1 ton rectangle and prepped for transport. The packaged recyclables are then shipped to vendors via rail, ship, or 18-wheeler. If you are using a private waste hauler, contact them directly to learn more about where your recyclables are going.

Myth: Since we have plenty of landfills, recycling isn't important.

Recycling has many benefits, the chief of which are the conservation of natural resources, reduced energy consumption, and the pollution and environmental impact associated with them (clear-cutting, oil drilling, mining, burning coal to melt steel, etc.). By recycling, you are conserving natural resources and reducing the amount of pollution and greenhouse gases released into the environment. Also, the impacts of landfills are greater than simply the space they take up. As organic matter breaks down in a landfill, it produces methane, a potent greenhouse gas. By reducing the amount of organic material sent to the landfill, you are helping to reduce greenhouse gases.

Myth: Someone sorts trash and pulls out the recyclables before it goes to the landfill.

In the City's sanitation services, anything thrown into the trash will end up in the landfill (some private haulers may have a different system). The labor required to sort through trash after it has already been mixed is cost-prohibitive and almost never happens. The only feasible way of separating recyclables is "source separation," meaning each person separates their trash at the time they throw it away. The only effort here is the difference between throwing trash into one bin or another.

Myth: Incineration is safe these days and you can burn trash for the electricity.

Incineration still produces emissions which go into the air and include air pollutants and greenhouse gases. While it is true that some incinerators also produce electricity, it is not without impact. Recycling the material, or better still reusing or reducing its use, is a much more efficient way of handling the material.

Myth: You cannot tell if something is made of recycled content.

Items made of recycled materials are typically labeled by the type of recycled material in them. Look for these labels when shopping: **Recycled:** At least part of the material in a product was used before, so some part of the product is not made from virgin sources. **Post-Consumer material:** Material that has been used by consumers or businesses, put into a recycling bin, and remanufactured into new product. **Pre-Consumer or Post-Industrial Material:** Materials left over from the manufacturing process and re-used in the same plant.

*Sources: Common Myths About Recycling, Harvard University – www.uos.harvard.edu/fmo/recycling/myths.shtml
City of Chicago Recycling and Waste Management – www.chicagorecycles.org*



Know Your Recycling Facts



Recycling makes sense. It's good for the planet and the economy. Did you know ...

- ❖ Recycling generates revenue to help offset the program costs, while incineration and landfilling do not. The more people recycle, the **cheaper** it gets.
- ❖ Recycling creates more than **one million U.S. jobs** in recycled product manufacturing alone. There are 10 times more jobs in recycling than there are in disposal.
- ❖ Through recycling, the U.S. is saving enough energy to provide electricity to **9 million** homes per year.
- ❖ It takes **95% less energy** to recycle aluminum than it does to make it from raw materials. You can recycle aluminum an unlimited number of times. Making recycled steel saves 60%, recycled newspaper 40%, recycled plastics 70%, and recycled glass 40%.
- ❖ The number of landfills is **decreasing**, while the cost to send waste to them is on the rise.
- ❖ Landfills are responsible for **36% of all methane emissions** in the U.S., one of the most potent causes of climate change.
- ❖ Many easily recycled materials are still **thrown away**. For example, 73% of glass containers, 77% of magazines, 66% of plastic soda and milk bottles, and 45% of newspapers are not recycled.
- ❖ Reduce your waste output by **composting**. Composting allows you to turn your food scraps, yard waste, and other biodegradable items into a nutritious soil conditioner.
- ❖ Even more environmentally-friendly than recycling is waste **reuse and reduction**. You can try reusing the item you will throw away or, better yet, decide if you even need it in the first place.
- ❖ **Close the loop!** Buying products made from recycled materials saves natural resources and ensures a demand for recyclables.

Sources: U.S. EPA - www.epa.gov/osw/conserve/rrrr/recycle.htm

Common Myths About Recycling – Harvard University www.uos.harvard.edu/fmo/recycling/myths.shtml

What resources are available in Chicago?

- ❖ There are 38 **Blue Recycling Drop-Off Centers** located in communities across the city. Chicagoans can bring paper, plastics, aluminum, and glass for recycling during daylight hours. All recyclables can be tossed in together.
- ❖ The **Blue Cart Program** serves over 240,000 homes in Chicago. See a map at the City's recycling website. Like the Drop-Off Centers, recyclables do not need to be separated. Residents with blue cart service can also volunteer for the program by becoming a **Recycling Block Captain**. Contact recyclingblockcaptains@gmail.com for more information.
- ❖ When thrown out with our garbage, household chemicals and electronic waste (e.g., computers, televisions, cell phones, and more) which often contain hazardous substances, such as lead, mercury, and PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls) can contaminate our air, soil and water. Dispose of your household chemicals responsibly and recycle your old electronics by dropping them off at the City's **Household Chemicals & Computer Recycling Facility** at 1150 N. North Branch Street.

For more information, including a list of recyclable materials, visit www.chicagorecycles.org.

