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EPA
United States
Environmental Protection
Agency

Resource Conservation Challenge: Improving Recycling Nationwide

Although Americans continue to reiterate our belief in the value of recycling, our recycling efforts seem to be leveling off, right when we need to do more. Recycling has environmental benefits at every stage in the life cycle of a consumer product—from the raw material that it's made with, to the final method of disposal. Think about all the material value and the energy that we simply lose when we throw away products. When you discard a product, like an aluminum can, you lose the material outright. For example, it takes 530,000 BTUs to put 1 ton of aluminum cans in a landfill. Recycling that same ton of aluminum saves that half million BTUs, which is equivalent to nearly 1,500 gallons of gas. So, you can see recycling not only reduces greenhouse gas emissions but also conserves energy and natural resources.

The main goal of the Resource Conservation Challenge (RCC) is to change the way Americans think about waste—to see the value of a used material as a product or commodity, not a waste. We want you to realize your impact on the environment before you act—whether you're reading today's newspaper, eating lunch, grabbing a bottle of water, or mailing a package. All the materials we use, and actions we take, in our daily lives affect our environment. By committing ourselves to reduce more waste, to reuse and recycle more materials, to buy more recycled and recyclable products, and to reduce toxic chemicals in products and waste, we conserve energy and preserve natural resources. To this end, the RCC relies on voluntary partnerships to promote and encourage the reuse and recycling of materials. Our partners are getting positive economic rewards and environmental results that are moving us toward our 35 percent national recycling goal.

Goal: 35 Percent National Recycling Rate

The RCC is focusing on three broad municipal solid waste streams with high generation rates and significant potential for increased recovery or recycling:

- Paper and paperboard
- Food scraps and yard trimmings
- Packaging and containers

We are focusing on these materials generated at schools and office buildings, by landscapers and food services, and at "recycling on-the-go" venues, such as shopping centers. To help accomplish our goal, we are collaborating with partners, key stakeholders, and recognized experts to identify creative and innovative ways to increase recycling, change our disposal culture, and build an infrastructure to ensure sustainability.

WHAT CAN YOU SAVE TODAY?
S M T W T F S
RESOURCE CONSERVATION CHALLENGE

-Recycled/Recyclable. Printed with Vegetable Oil Based Inks on 100% Postconsumer, Process Chlorine Free Paper

Key to Achieving 35 Percent MSW Reduction

CATEGORY	2001 RECYCLING RATES	2008 RCC GOALS
Paper and paperboard	36.7 million tons	44.1 million tons
Food waste	0.7 million tons	1.28 million tons
Yard trimmings	15.8 million tons	16.8 million tons
Paper folding cartons	0.48 million tons	2 million tons
Wood packaging	1.25 million tons	2 million tons
Plastic wraps	0.17 million tons	0.5 million tons
Beverage containers	2.93 million tons	4.36 million tons

RCC Partnerships Address Solid Waste

We're working with states, local governments, national recycling organizations, recycling businesses, and others to provide more recycling opportunities everywhere. We're collaborating with businesses and governments that offer the best opportunities for success. Examples of partnerships and initiatives include the following.

- **WasteWise.**
  Our decade-plus WasteWise partnership now includes more than 1,300 corporations, government agencies, universities, hospitals, and others who are committed to reducing waste and conserving energy and resources. WasteWise provides technical assistance to help develop, implement, and measure partners' waste reduction and recycling activities. Collectively, WasteWise partners have prevented nearly 5 millions tons of waste, which equates to removing more than 3 million passenger cars from the roads for one year.
- **GreenScapes Alliance.**
  GreenScapes provides cost-efficient and environmentally friendly solutions for large-scale landscaping projects. Designed to help preserve natural resources and prevent waste and pollution, the partnership aims to create a unified influence over the reduction, reuse, and recycling of waste materials in large land use applications, such as brownfields, highways, or golf courses. By reducing, reusing, recycling, and rebuying recycled materials, partners help improve both the environment and their bottom line. A partner commits to measurable goals through efforts such as composting and mulching organic wastes and using native plants to reduce water and pesticide use.
- **America's Marketplace Recycles!**
  Several leading shopping centers nationwide participate in America's Marketplace Recycles! partnership, which focuses on reduced packaging, resource management, buying recycled products, and educating consumers on the value of recycling.

- **A Guide for Reducing Waste at Shopping Centers.**
  Developed with the International Council of Shopping Centers (ICSC), *A Guide to Waste Reduction at Shopping Centers* helps shopping centers prevent waste and improve recycling. It is used as an informal standard for ICSC to reward and publicly recognize innovative and successful waste prevention and recycling activities by retailers and shopping centers.
- **Donating Edible Food.**
  We are working with the U.S. Department of Agriculture to develop a guide for institutions that generate food waste. The guide will help them donate edible food or learn how to compost food waste.

Resource Conservation Challenge

The RCC challenges everyone to accept responsibility and rededicate themselves to conserving resources. Accepting responsibility for improving our environment means changing our habits, processes, and practices. Everyone has a role. Businesses, consumers, and governments work together to make changes that result in products designed to be more easily reused and recycled. Manufacturers can make products less toxic and more recyclable, and prevent and recycle waste. Individuals and businesses can change their buying and disposal habits, seeking less toxic products and recycling at every opportunity. For more information on the RCC, see <www.epa.gov/rcc> and the *RCC Action Plan* at <www.epa.gov/epaoswer/osw/conserve/action-plan/act-toc.htm>.

Resources

EPA's **Make a Difference Campaign** (www.epa.gov/epaoswer/education/mad.htm) educates and engages middle school students in resource conservation and environmental protection by helping them make informed decisions in their day-to-day life. By providing tools and materials, and working with individual schools to host an environmental event, this campaign achieves measurable waste reduction results.

America Recycles Day (www.americarecyclesday.org) is a national all-volunteer, non-profit organization that encourages Americans to recycle and to buy recycled products. Every year, America Recycles Day holds a national awareness event to promote the social, environmental, and economic benefits of buying recycled and recycling.

National Recycling Coalition (NRC) (www.nrc-recycle.org) is dedicated to the advancement and improvement of recycling. A true coalition, NRC provides technical information, education, training, outreach, and advocacy service on recycling, source reduction, composting, and reuse. The 4,000 members include recycling and environmental organizations; large and small businesses; federal, state and local governments; and individuals.