
Recycling Works!

Residential Recycling Fact Sheet

What is recycling?

Recycling involves the separation and collection of materials for processing and remanufacturing into new products, and the use of the products to complete the cycle. Much of the aluminum, glass, paper and steel used for packaging today is already recycled. Half the nation's aluminum cans are made from recycled aluminum, and one-quarter of the raw fibers used in the paper industry are from recycled paper products. Glass and steel used in containers can be recycled over and over.

The recycling of aluminum and steel cans, cardboard, glass, newspapers and certain plastics is a growing industry in Pennsylvania. Already more than 85 Pennsylvania businesses are using recyclables collected by the state's recycling programs to make new products like glass containers, office paper, laundry detergent bottles, steel framing, roofing, and pipes; steel sheet for cars and cans, and much more. Recyclables kept separate from household waste are collected at recycling programs. Collected materials are further sorted and processed for sale to manufacturers in Pennsylvania and other states.

Money earned from the sale of recyclable materials can benefit the individual recycler or help communities and companies offset operating costs for recycling. Recycling also allows some communities to reduce waste disposal costs.

Society's energy consumption is also reduced by recycling. For example, it requires less energy to make a new glass bottle from a recycled one because recycled glass melts at a lower temperature than the raw materials. Recycling also prolongs the life of the glassmaking equipment. Similarly, making an aluminum can from recycled aluminum uses a fraction of the energy needed to make from bauxite ore.

What are we doing about it?

Pennsylvania made recycling the law in July 1988 with Act 101, the Municipal Waste Planning, Recycling and Waste Reduction Act, thus making Pennsylvania the largest state in the nation to require recycling. By 1997, nearly nine million people in more than 1,600 communities and all state agencies participated in the recycling effort. While curbside recycling is mandatory in 415 communities with populations greater than 5,000, more than 450 additional communities have developed curbside recycling programs voluntarily. More than 750 other communities are served by drop-off centers for recyclables.

Act 101 requires landfills and resource-recovery (waste-to-energy) operations to establish recyclable drop-off centers accessible to the public so that people who take their own trash to a landfill can also recycle. All of these elements of Act 101 create a comprehensive program that will allow everyone to participate in the recycling and waste reduction effort.