

HOME RECYCLING

A Factsheet from Austin Energy's Green Building Program

The easiest, least expensive, and safest ways to reduce material production and disposal impacts are to produce less, use less, re-use more, and recycle everything we can. Of the millions of tons of garbage Americans produce each year it is estimated that more than 70% of it could be recycled. The City of Austin offers an extensive recycling program, with curbside pick-up of paper, glass, plastic, and yard waste for single family homes.

The Real Cost of Materials

The production as well as the disposal of everything we throw away has a cost, both for the consumer and the environment. Raw materials and energy had to be used to make the products – some from renewable sources and some not. This is known as the product's first cost.

The second cost is the price of landfilling the product. There is also a less considered third cost that includes the potential land, air, and water pollution occurring from the toxins our garbage often contains. Landfill space is quickly vanishing. Pollution levels are increasing. Reduction, re-use, and recycling on everyone's part can positively impact our resources and environment.

Using recycled content (as opposed to new/raw) materials provides approximately 50% energy savings and 85% reduction in industrial air pollution. Using recycled materials can also conserve approximately 50% in industrial water use and reduces industrial water pollution by about 40%. This also reduces demand on our virgin/raw materials and resources. For example, using recycled paper can reduce the demand for virgin wood pulp by approximately 40%, as well as reduce energy and water use, and air and water pollution.

The Recycling Cycle

Incredibly, Americans spend more on food packaging in a given year than our farmers receive in net income. Buying bulk items and products with little or no packaging, sometimes called pre-cycling, can reduce what goes into the waste stream in the first place.

The most common things Americans throw away are glass, aluminum, paper, and kitchen and yard waste (often called organic waste). The importance of recycling becomes apparent when we think of just a few of the impacts. For instance, the energy saved by recycling one glass bottle will light a 100-watt bulb for four hours. An aluminum can in a landfill wastes as much energy as it would if you filled it half-way with gasoline and poured it out – and it will still not be decomposed after 500 years. Each Sunday's newspaper production in America uses an entire forest – more than ½ million trees. Composting organic waste is good for more than just your soil, as this waste accounts for about 70% of the average American's garbage.

Recycling at Home

Following are methods of storing recyclable materials, both household and hazardous.

- ❑ A built-in *kitchen recycling center* is a section of kitchen cabinetry designed to accommodate easy sorting of recyclables.
- ❑ A built-in *recycling holding area* is a location within the home that conveniently holds sorted recyclables until they are picked up or taken to a collection point.
- ❑ A *hazardous material storage cabinet* is designed to prevent unhealthful exposure to hazardous materials such as paints, solvents, cleaners, batteries, yard chemicals, fuels, pesticides and others. These materials need to be separated for proper disposal. They need to be in a location where access is controlled and outgassing into the living areas is prevented.

The primary location in a home where refuse is received and collected is the kitchen. This is the best location to initially separate materials that can be recycled.

A kitchen that does not have a specific spot and system for sorting recyclables must rely on an owner-initiated system that may be used inconsistently if it has any inconvenience associated with it. Recycling is more likely to occur if it can be accomplished in a neat and convenient manner, which is why built-in systems are encouraged.

The recycling holding area is the next step for making recycling convenient and routine. After materials have accumulated in the kitchen, they can then be transferred to containers in an area convenient to taking them out for curbside pickup or to a collection center. A good location for the holding area is a section of the garage.

The outside wall of a garage is a good location for a hazardous material storage cabinet. These might be items such as paints, fertilizers, pest control and cleaning products. A vent to the outdoors from the cabinet is easily installed in such a location. These cabinets should be locked to increase child safety. The importance of such a feature becomes clear when we consider that the average home today has more chemicals than the average laboratory 100 years ago.

Resources

see "*Kitchen Accessories*", "*Kitchen Cabinets & Equip - Household*", "*Hardware-Retail*" and "*Home Centers*" in *Yellow Pages*

City of Austin Household Hazardous Waste Collection Facility

2514 Business Center Drive
(call for directions)

Austin, Texas

(512) 974-4343

Hours: Tuesdays and Wednesdays
12 p.m. to 7 p.m.

the City accepts household quantities of home chemicals for disposal and recycling

Ecology Action

707 E. 9th St.

Austin, TX 78701

www.ecology-action.org

recycle@ecology-action.org

Phone : 512-322-0000, Fax : 512-322-0625

recycling collection locations in and around Austin, clearinghouse of information about recycling

Rev-A-Shelf

2409 Plantside Drive

Jeffersontown, KY 40299

800-626-1126

<http://www.rev-a-shelf.com>

kitchen cabinet storage management systems and containers

City of Austin Solid Waste Services Information Line

(512) 494-9400

<http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/sws>

information on garbage collection, curb side recycling and yard waste collection

City of Austin Waste Reduction Assistance Program

974-9727

<http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/sws/wrap>

contact Bob Fernandez for more information on commercial recycling