

**sus·tain·able** *adj* \sə-'stā-nə-bəl\  
*a* : of, relating to, or being a method of harvesting or using a resource so that the resource is not depleted or permanently damaged



It is our role as members of global community to meet our needs in a way that does not compromise the ability future generations to meet their needs. Each one of our “throw away” lifestyles occurring on a finite planet collectively affects the health and quality of life of every living thing on this earth. As a society, we need to sustainably manage our materials in order to have the clean air, water, food, and shelter that all current and future humans need for basic survival. Let’s not be the species that became extinct by consuming more than we need, and neglecting to care about the health and environment of our growing population.



For more information please visit our website at:  
[www.rcapsolutions.org/forms\\_SolidWaste.html](http://www.rcapsolutions.org/forms_SolidWaste.html)

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## Toss out Your “Throw-Away” Lifestyle

Most of the products we use every day were designed to be disposable, destined to become waste. Too many common products are cheaply manufactured abroad and shipped around the world to be sold to us, only to be used briefly before we toss them out on our way to the store to buy more products. We Americans like disposable products because they are cheap and convenient, but often we don’t understand the full price that society pays for that luxury. There are serious economic, environmental, and human health implications from recklessly wasting our resources.

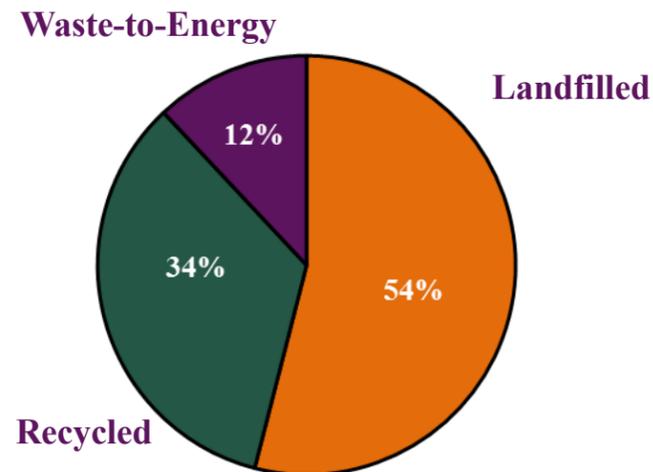


### If you think that waste reduction is just an environmental issue, think again!



- ✓ Disposing of waste is very expensive and your municipality has to pay for the disposal costs either through taxes or user fees
- ✓ Your municipality can earn revenue from recycling that could offset the solid waste budget and save your tax dollars
- ✓ The recycling industry creates a range of jobs that support the US economy

### Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) Management in the United States



The US EPA estimates that 55-65% of total MSW is residential waste, and 35-45% is generated by commercial and institutional locations such as businesses, schools and hospitals.

Source: US EPA, “Municipal Solid Waste Generation, Recycling, and Disposal in the United States, 2010”

### The “Throw-Away” Myth

#### “Away” by Burning:

Burning our waste is done either with or without energy recovery. Waste-to-Energy sounds appealing because we have too much trash, and a need for energy. However, that small amount of energy hardly compares to all of the energy it took to extract, process and transport that material in the first place. We would do more energy saving by reducing, reusing, or recycling our stuff. Additionally, according to the US EPA, incineration releases more CO<sub>2</sub> per kilowatt hour than burning natural gas, oil, or coal!

#### “Away” by Burying:

Over half of our waste is buried in the ground each year, either as toxic compacted material or toxic ash. For these reasons no one wants to live near a landfill, and if we conserve our existing landfill space we will reduce the need to site new ones. Towns and cities can also avoid paying disposal costs by generating less waste. Furthermore, it just plain doesn’t make sense to bury all of our resources that we have already extracted from the earth!

## What's in Our Trash?

Americans consume an average of 340 aluminum beverage cans each year, and we only recycle 45% of them. The Container Recycling Institute estimates that if we dug up every aluminum can we buried for the past 40 years, they would be worth \$21 billion at today's scrap prices.

Organics make up almost 1/3 of our total waste. By keeping this material out of the waste stream, we can cut our total waste by 1/3, reduce methane gas emissions from our landfills, keep recyclables from getting dirty, and have a clean and valuable additive for our soil.

Every ton of mixed paper recycled can save the energy equivalent of 165 gallons of gasoline!



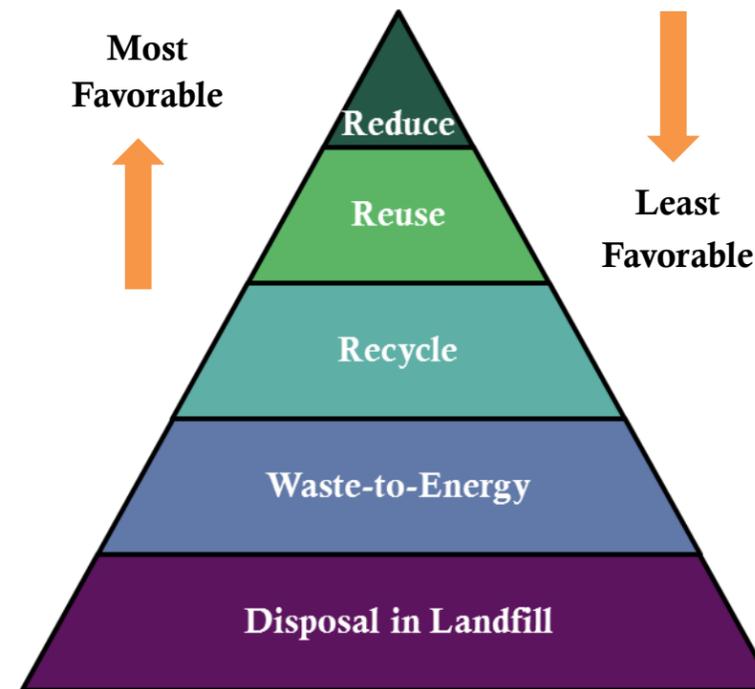
Recycling just one ton of aluminum cans conserves the energy equivalent of 36 barrels of oil!

Polyvinyl Chloride (PVC) is one of the most common, yet toxic, forms of plastic that we use. You can find it in everything from food wrap, shoes, and toys to medical and building supplies. It is linked to cancer at almost every stage of its life and releases dioxin into the air when it is burned.

We cut down 4 billion trees each year just for making paper. Trees generate the oxygen that we breathe, sequester carbon from the atmosphere, provide habitat for many species, nourish and stabilize the soil, and regulate the hydrologic cycle.

## The Waste Management Hierarchy

As the diagram below indicates, it is better to reduce and reuse than to recycle. Try to extend the life of your *stuff* by purchasing durable goods, buying and selling used goods, borrowing, renting, and by investing in maintenance and repair. You will save money by only shopping for quality goods rather than cheap, flimsy products that don't last and need to be replaced. Reuse keeps valuable resources out of the waste stream and saves money in purchases and disposal costs. Reuse also preserves the "embodied energy" that was originally used to process and manufacture that good and creates less air and water pollution than making a new item or recycling.



## Did you know that the recycling industry creates jobs that help strengthen the US economy?

Recycling creates a need for public and private businesses that haul, process and broker recycled materials, as well as companies that manufacture and distribute products made with those recycled materials. The recycling industry can support a variety of skilled workers ranging from materials sorters and truck drivers, to brokers and sales representatives, process engineers, chemists, and economists. In short, recycling is actively contributing to America's economic security by creating a range of jobs for millions of people across the country.



## Consumerism wasn't always part of the "American way of life"



After WWII, the US evolved into a consumer driven economy and our society began to value excess and disposability over thrift and quality. As a result, our municipalities have been burdened with an enormous amount of waste.

In our modern daily lives it is not easy to avoid making waste, even if we try, because most of the products we use were designed to become obsolete almost as quickly as they were wrapped in excessive packaging to grab our consumer attentions. Advertising and social stigmas often reinforce our *over-consumptive* behavior and make even the savviest shopper buy things they don't need.

Can our society change course and separate success and self-worth from *excessive* material belongings, only consuming what we need while viewing our waste as a resource? Until we experience a dramatic shift in the way we view our material world, we need to think of economical ways to manage our excessive amounts of waste, one of which is recycling.

\*Percentages are a fraction of all U.S. Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) material generated in 2010 ( Landfilled, Incinerated, Waste -To-Energy, and Recycling)