



Lesson Resources

Buy Recycled

Buying recycled is buying products made from recycled materials – otherwise known as recycled-content products.

Recycling is a three-step process. That's why the recycling symbol ♻️ has three arrows that complete a loop. The first step is collection – that's when you put your recyclables such as aluminum cans, plastic bottles, glass bottles and newspapers into your curbside recycling bin or into the bins at the drop-off center. The second step is manufacturing – that's when the recyclables are processed into raw materials to make new products. The third step is buying recycled – that's when you complete the recycling loop.

Buying recycled-content products creates demand for recycled materials and sustains local recycling programs. Without a demand for recycled-content products, there would be no reason to collect recyclables.

Are recycled-content products hard to find?

No. All the materials you recycle, such as aluminum, paper, plastic, glass and cardboard, are made into thousands of recycled-content products. You may be buying recycled and not know it. You go to the grocery store, right? Most cereal boxes, aluminum and steel cans, and glass bottles have recycled content. Many products you use at home, including paper towels, garden hoses, compost bins, detergent bottles, plastic lumber, paint, carpeting, insulation, clothing and shoes, can be made from recycled materials. Many office and school supplies such as notebooks, notebook paper, copy paper, legal pads, pens and pencils also can be made from recycled materials.

Do recycled-content products cost more?

Many of these products are priced competitively with their non-recycled counterparts. Some recycled-content products do cost more, but often an increase in demand for those products will allow manufacturers to lower their cost.

Are recycled-content products inferior?

There are inferior and superior products no matter what you buy. Recycled-content products are no exception. Despite what some critics say, the quality and performance of recycled-content products are not automatically inferior to their non-recycled counterparts. It's almost an urban legend that recycled-content copy paper doesn't work as well in printers and copiers as non-recycled paper. Recycled-content products are manufactured to the same performance standards as virgin products.

Is it a recycled-content product?

When shopping, look for the arrows on the products you buy and read the label. That's the best way to identify recycled-content products. There are a few terms that you need to know.

Post-consumer material comes from products used by consumers and collected for recycling. Pre-consumer material is not used by consumers but rather collected as a waste material during manufacturing such as paper trimmings at a paper mill. Choosing products with a higher content of post-consumer

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Green Purchasing

South Carolina state government is committed to environmentally preferred purchasing in recognition of the need to more efficiently use natural resources, reduce waste, save money, sustain markets for materials collected in recycling programs and protect South Carolina's environment, economy and the quality of life of all its citizens.



Visit www.mmo.sc.gov for more information.

material helps sustain local recycling programs. It's important to know that most products are not made completely from recycled material. For example, copy paper may have a total recycled content of 50 percent, comprised of 30 percent post-consumer material and 20 percent pre-consumer material. The remaining 50 percent is made from virgin materials.

What is the difference between recycled and recyclable?

A recycled product is one made from recycled material. A recyclable product is one that can be collected for recycling. Remember, buying a recyclable product only has meaning if that product can be recycled in your community.

Let's go shopping.

Here are some tips to keep in mind when shopping.

- Buy only what you need. Use what you buy.
- Buy products made from recycled materials.
- Bring your own reusable shopping bags. Reusable bags can easily become a habit and save an astonishing amount of paper and plastic.
- Buy less packaging. Compare the size of the package to the size of the product. If the package is designed to take up as much shelf space as possible, choose a competing product. Do without products that are packaged inside more than one layer. Avoid "single-serve" packages. Choose products that are not in plastic trays and that do not have attached promotional material.
- Buy in bulk and/or concentrates. These practices reduce packaging, save you money and reduce trips to the store. Buy large single containers instead of the same volume in many smaller containers (e.g., two-liter bottles vs. six packs). For any item with a long shelf life (e.g., laundry detergent), buy the biggest container you can. Put manageable amounts in reusable, smaller containers for everyday use. Don't be fooled – some bulk packages are just individually wrapped items that are packaged yet again.
- Look at the container or packaging and choose the one that can be recycled in your community. For example, if glass is not accepted for recycling in your community, avoid products packaged in glass containers.
- Avoid throw-away products. Avoid single or limited-use items such as throwaway cleansing pads, non-refillable pens and plastic razors.

What's the bottom line? Think carefully about your purchases and their impact on the environment.

WANT TO LEARN MORE?

For more information on buying recycled and related topics, visit the following websites.

- www.epa.gov/garbage/buyrec.htm
- www.greenseal.org
- www.edf.org

FIVE GOOD REASONS TO BUY RECYCLED

- **Buying recycled completes the recycling loop and makes recycling work.**
- **Buying recycled reduces the amount of waste disposed of in landfills.** The recycled materials are made into new products saving landfill space and reducing the need to build landfills.
- **Buying recycled conserves natural resources** by making new products out of recycled material.
- **Buying recycled reduces or eliminates pollution by reducing the need to extract, move and process raw materials.** In most cases, making products from recycled materials creates less air pollution, water pollution and waste than making products from raw materials.
- **Buying recycled saves energy.** Products usually take less energy to make from recycled materials than raw materials. For example, it takes 95 percent less energy to make aluminum from recycled aluminum than raw materials.