

Waste Management Hierarchy (cont.)

Reuse refers to finding another use for something that has already served its original purpose, without the need for remanufacturing or processing. Donating furniture and clothes to charitable organizations is one example. Using old ice cream tubs and margarine containers to store and freeze food is another. If you cannot reduce the need for a specific item, at least try to reuse it.

The third part of the waste management hierarchy is recycle; together, reduce, reuse and recycle form the famous "3Rs". Using a *Blue Box* or another form of recycling obviously keeps waste out of dumps and *landfills*. More importantly, it slows the need for virgin resources; many non-renewable resources are already in short supply. Remanufacturing aluminium from recycled goods is 95% more energy efficient than making it from raw materials. Mining waste is reduced by 97% when scrap iron is used instead of iron ore.

Recover is the often forgotten fourth "R". This procedure involves the extraction of organic materials or energy from mixed waste. Composting is one form of recovery. Kitchen waste, such as vegetable peelings, and yard waste, such as grass clippings, are decomposed into an organic matter that is used as a soil conditioner. Individuals and communities alike can compost. This process returns material back to a variety of ecosystems, rather than just those near the landfill.

Incineration can be used to recover energy from burning waste. Some facilities combust the waste to produce steam. The steam is used to produce electricity for heating and lighting. Incineration reduces the volume of waste that needs to be disposed. Unfortunately, burning waste may create air pollution; the ashes that are left after burning can also be hazardous (high levels of heavy metals and toxic substances).

The final and least desirable stage of the hierarchy is disposal. Landfilling is the primary method, but all forms of disposal are merely ways to avoid the real issue. A good analogy is the sweeping of dust under a rug. The waste is out of sight, but it hasn't really gone anywhere. Some waste will always have to be disposed, but there is no need to "throw away" as much as we do.

Geographic, economic, social and political factors can make one or more of the steps impractical. Placing deposits on glass juice bottles, so they can be reused, is unprofitable. Because the volume of bottles bought is low, in comparison to pop bottles, it is more practical and economical to recycle the juice containers. Another example is incineration. In the province of Ontario, political legislation and public pressure have restricted the use of this recovery method.

The hierarchy is by no means the final answer to the waste issue. It is, however, an excellent and extremely effective place from which to start.