

WHAT TO DO WITH THE TRASH?

Rural properties can generate a variety of waste. There are ways to reduce pressure on landfills.

Laura McGinley

For years, we tossed garbage with an “out-of-sight, out-of-mind” approach.

As Wyoming communities face local landfill closures, we have had to become more aware of the way household waste is handled. Finding alternative ways of handling waste has become a priority.

Many larger towns and cities have started recycling programs that successfully divert approximately 20 percent of waste from going into the landfill, but, due to costs and distance from recycled materials markets, community programs are not practical throughout much of the state.

So, for many residents, the question remains, “What to do with the trash?”

Rural properties tend to have a wide range of wastes to handle. Finding ways to manage these waste streams can take planning, but decreasing the quantity of materials going to the landfill and saving money on disposal fees is possible. The simplest approach is using the three Rs of refuse:

Reduce: decreasing the amount of waste produced by limiting materials brought home.

Reuse: finding innovative ways to repurpose items and materials.

Recycle: sending waste to facilities that reprocess the materials into new products.

There are many ways to accomplish these steps, and the internet is a wealth of information. A quick search of any of the three Rs helps find information on handling nearly every type of material we dispose of. Whether reducing, reusing, or recycling, here are some ways to get started minimizing the waste in and around the home.

Paper:

Paper is one of the main materials we throw away. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, paper accounts for more than 40 percent of a landfill’s contents. Addressing this alone can reduce a household’s overall waste load.

Reduce: Junk mail is often a large portion of the total paper we throw out. Reducing what comes in reduces what goes out.

- To opt out of prescreened credit and insurance offers, call toll-free 1-888-5-OPT-OUT (1-888-567-8688) or visit www.optoutprescreen.com.
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will not stop mailings from organizations that do not use the DMA's service. To register, go to www.dmachoice.org, or mail your request with a \$1 processing fee to: DMAchoice, Direct Marketing Association, P.O. Box 643, Carmel, NY 10512

Reuse: Shredded paper can be used in a variety of ways.

- Compost – newspaper can be used in small amounts in compost.
- Shredded paper or for animal bedding or used in a mixture for hydroseeding.

Packaging:

Comprised of cardboard, fluid cartons, plastics, paper, metal, and glass, these materials hog one-third of landfill space. Packaging is important for preserving and protecting products, which makes them more available and affordable overall. Yet, we know many materials, such as plastics, can take hundreds of years to break down, and other materials may contain chemicals that can contaminate water and soil. Finding ways to keep them out of landfills substantially reduces a household's overall waste stream.

- When making purchases, look for sustainable packaging choices, such as cardboard or paper-fiber that can go into the backyard or a community compost bin. Avoid products sold in small, single-serving disposable containers and instead buy larger packages and transfer to reusable containers. Glass jars make good food-totes, and many companies now offer reusable "baggies" and other items for storing and carrying food.
- There was a time folks found ways



Recycled glass used in a landscape

to reuse nearly everything; we moved away from that practice a few decades back, but interest in creative reuse is coming back in force. Websites like Pinterest have thousands of ideas for everything from small tins and bottles to large wooden pallets and appliance parts.

- Glass may not be part of most city recycling programs due to the high cost of recycling it and the danger broken glass presents for waste management personnel, but if the goal is to find alternatives for disposal, there are options worth considering. Small glass crushers range from \$2,000 to \$7,000 and can handle up to 15 tons of glass per hour. Recycled glass can be used for cement mix, roadways, abrasive media, concrete/construction aggregate (replacing natural sand), pipe bedding material, leachate drainage layers, landscaping and water filtration, and decorative landscaping. Small towns or rural collaborations could consider this as an option and find local ways to use crushed glass.
- Metal cans and containers are waste items that are definitely a resource and one of the easier

materials to find a market. Most salvage yards take all types of metal, so aluminum, tin, steel, and copper can be taken to a local salvage business. Beyond packaging, many items can go to salvage that we do not often think of including, such as wire, bi/tricycles, lawn mowers, coat hangers, grates, small metal appliances or kitchen utensils, pots and pans, golf clubs, door handles.

- Cardboard is a material that has value in the recycling market. Even if multi-material recycling is not an option, community collection and sale of cardboard can often pay for itself.
- Medication bottles can be donated to veterinary clinics. Call first to see if your vet could use them.

Printer cartridges: Often, local stores and organizations will take these but another option is sending them to one of the following companies that purchase empties. You have the option to either take cash for your empty cartridges or donate the proceeds to a charity of your choice.

- » www.ecyclegroup.com
- » www.recycle4charity.org
- » www.freerecycling.com
- » www.empties4cash.com

Large appliances, machinery, and chemicals: Utilize local companies or agencies like scrap yards to dispose of metal, local weed and pest to dispose of herbicides/pesticides, county road and bridge offices or local auto shops for oil, and electronics to e-waste facilities.

While reaching zero waste in the home is not realistic, following the three R's of waste management can go a long way toward reducing the waste that ends up in the landfill.

What will you do with this magazine once you're done reading? Laura McGinley hopes (as do we!) you recycle or pass along to another interested person. She is the district clerk and communication specialist with the Laramie Rivers Conservation District headquartered in Laramie. McGinley can be contacted at (307) 721-0072 or at laura.mcginley@lrccd.net.