

Reduce Reuse Recycle – Where does our Recycling go?

It is important to do the three “R”s in the order they are. First Reduce, second Reuse and thirdly, Recycle.

Many people feel cynical about recycling, concerned that recycling just ends up in the landfill. It makes us feel that the effort may not be worth it.

It is justified to feel cynical especially about plastic recycling as the latest statistics show that Canada recycles just 9 percent of its plastics, with the rest dumped into the landfill and incinerators or thrown away as litter. (source Recycling council of Ontario). This means that no matter how good intentioned we are, we still are very imperfect at recycling plastic.

There are a number of reasons we find that plastic recycling is wasted. First, many people don't even bother to recycle plastic or find it so soiled that they don't feel inclined to clean it and just toss it in the bin. What is very disturbing though is that around 25% of plastic that is recycled is dirty and contaminates the rest of the recycled materials, so the effort is entirely wasted. All of this ends up in landfills.

Some plastic, such as pop bottles and milk jugs can be repurposed into the same things that they started as.

Our electronic waste, if properly disposed of, is mostly truly recycled. Components are taken apart and remade into new items. Batteries are a good example, they are sorted (there are four sorting facilities in Canada), they are sent to the processing destination that deals with the materials the batteries are made of, metals are extracted from the batteries, and sold back on the market.

Electrical waste, such as appliances are collected at local recycling centres, shipped to reprocessing plants where they are taken apart, useful parts reused, the metal shredded into small pieces. Metal pieces are melted and sold, and non-useful parts (such as plastic) go into recycling when possible.

As you can see, electronic and electrical items contain many materials that can be reused or recycled. Reusing these items saves energy and resources.

When electrical and electronic items end up in the landfill, hazardous substances can leak out and cause water and land contamination.

Paper mills within BC and Canada take our bales of cardboard and paper to recycle into new paper products.

Steel and aluminum materials are melted down and made into wire and other materials. There is no limit to the amount of times that metal can be melted and recycled. It could be an answer to many of our plastic containers.

Glass, as metal can be recycled again and again. It is taken, sorted per colour, melted down, and made into new products.

As you can see, when you are choosing what to purchase, if possible, purchasing products without plastic is the best way to recycle. Also, taking proper care to clean items thoroughly and recycled properly is important.

Please feel free to email me at Golden@wildsight.ca to give me feedback on this article and share your ideas and questions regarding Reduce, Reuse, Recycle.