

PRO P **FACT** Sheet

Environmental problems have become so complex that many individuals feel they can have no effect in making things better. In some cases, people even think recycling is a waste of time and money. So, defending recycling is an important part of education and awareness.

Recycling and the Environment

Recycling provides industry with an environmentally preferable source of raw materials.

Most people know that recycling plays an important role in managing the garbage generated in homes and businesses and that it reduces the reliance on landfills and incinerators. But recycling is far more than a local material management strategy; it is also an important strategy for reducing the environmental impacts of industrial production. Supplying industry with recycled materials, rather than "virgin" resources extracted from forests and mines, is environmentally preferable because it saves energy, reduces emissions of greenhouse gases, and other dangerous air and water pollutants, and because it conserves scarce natural resources.



Recycling reduces greenhouse gas emissions.

By reducing the amount of energy used by industry, recycling also reduces greenhouse gas emissions and helps stem the dangers of global climate change. This reduction is because much of the energy used in industrial processes and in transportation involves burning fossil fuels like gasoline, diesel and coal -- the most important sources of carbon and other greenhouse gas emissions into the environment.

Recycling saves energy.

Energy savings may be the most important environmental benefit of recycling, because using energy requires the consumption of scarce fossil fuels and involves emissions of numerous air and water. The steps in supplying recycled materials to industry (including collection, processing and transportation) typically use less energy than the steps in supplying virgin materials to industry (including extraction, refinement, transportation and processing). But most energy savings associated with recycling accrue in the manufacturing process itself, since recycled materials have already been processed at least once.

Recycling reduces emissions of air and water pollutants.

In addition to greenhouse gases, recycling can reduce a range of pollutants from entering the air and water. This benefit accrues, because of reduced fossil fuel use and the fact that recycled materials have already been processed once. The benefits also accrue because recycling keeps materials out of landfills, where they can introduce leachate into groundwater systems, and out of incinerators, which can emit pollutants into the air and the ash residue. Recycling has been shown to produce less of 28 different types of air and water pollutants, compared with using virgin materials in manufacturing and disposing wastes.

Recycling conserves natural resources.

Recycling reduces the need for landfills and other disposal facilities, thereby allowing local lands to be used in more environmentally preferable ways. And, by substituting scrap materials for the use of trees, metal ores, minerals, oil and other virgin materials, recycling reduces the pressure to expand forestry and mining production.

This fact sheet was developed by the Professional Recyclers of Pennsylvania, P.O. Box 25, Bellwood, PA 16617. For more information, visit our website, www.proprecycles.org, or contact us by email at prop@proprecycles.org. Material for this fact sheet was adapted from a fact sheet provided by the Northeast Recycling Council, Inc. We do our part to close the recycling loop and print our publications on recycled paper.