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Textiles Reuse and Recycling

"Don't Judge, Just Donate"
~ Unknown

Textiles Are So Much More Than Just Clothes!



Besides clothing, such as shirts, pants, dresses and shorts – textiles include bedding, backpacks, curtains, towels, stuffed animals, gloves, belts, ties, purses, handbags, shoes, slippers, undergarments and even holey socks! Many organizations will accept textiles that you may consider unwearable, like holey socks or ripped t-shirts, and recycle them to make other products such as wiping rags, car seat and pillow stuffing, and household insulation. The key is getting the message out to communities and residents - don't judge - just donate!

Unfortunately, only 15% of textiles are donated for reuse or recycling in the United States according to the [Secondary Materials and Recycled Textiles Association](#) (SMART). A portion of these textiles are sold by charities locally or distributed overseas to be resold as usable clothing while the clothing or other textiles that are not in good condition are reused as rags or recycled into fibers. In Connecticut, we dispose of about 96,500 tons of textiles every year in our waste-to-energy facilities. This costs Connecticut municipalities and taxpayers close to \$5.7 million in unnecessary disposal tipping fees (calculated using an average conservative tipping fee of \$60 per ton). We have a significant opportunity to save our communities disposal tipping fees, increase economic value, and reduce environmental impact by recovering more textiles!

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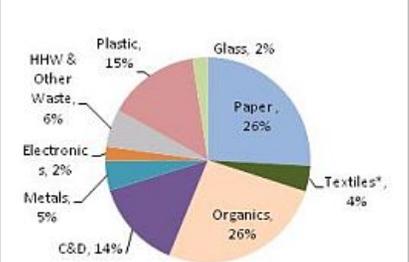
How Can I Reuse or Recycle My Textiles?

Even damaged clothing and other textiles may be repurposed—so don't be so quick to throw them away! If a textile is badly stained, missing buttons, or torn, it can still be used to make rags or used as fiber for car seats, pillows, stuffed animals, soundproof insulation, and many other purposes.

When clothing and other textiles can no longer be reused, they can be collected for recycling. There are many options to reuse and recycle textiles in your community through donation or consignment. Textiles can be collected curbside, dropped off at a retail location, or even mailed to an online outlet for used clothes. You may have seen the metal drop boxes at your local retail store, gas station, or transfer station – these [collection boxes](#) accept most textiles and are owned by non-profit **and** for-profit organizations.

Additionally, buying used items, such as clothing, helps reduce the amount of textiles consumed and discarded – there are plenty of thrift shops, consignment stores, and pawn shops in the state with quality used textiles available. Many of these organizations receive used textiles from people like you – and re-sell them for profit or to benefit community and social programs. Reducing consumption is

Connecticut's Municipal Solid Waste Disposed (2009)



Textiles including clothing, fabrics, curtains, blankets, stuffed animals, and other cloth material make up approximately 4% or 96,500 tons of Connecticut's waste stream.



the most significant behavior change individuals may take to limit environmental impact. So gather your clothing, bedding, handbags stuffed animals and much more and find out where you can reuse and recycle your textiles with the resources below.

Where Can I Recycle My Textiles?

Check with your [Municipal Recycling Coordinator](#) to see if your town offers textile collection and recycling programs.

The United Way of CT 2-1-1 [Clothing Donation Programs](#) provides a list of Connecticut options.

Consider donating your goods to [Goodwill Industries](#), [Salvation Army](#), [Vietnam Veterans of America](#), or some other organization

The Council for Textile Recycling's [Wear, Donate, Recycle](#) website allows you to search by zip code to find a place to donate your used textiles.

The [Secondary Materials and Recycled Textiles Association](#) (SMART) offers a search function to find recycling locations.

Search for local consignment shops in the phone book or online.

Approximately 74% (71,800 tons) of total disposed textiles are from residential sources and 26% (24,700 tons) are from non-residential sources such as universities, state agencies, and businesses.

[2009 State-wide Solid Waste Composition & Characterization Study](#)

Manufacturer and Retailer Programs

- [Eileen Fisher: Green Eileen](#) - Eileen Fisher Brand Only
- [H&M: Don't Let Fashion Go To Waste](#) - Any Brand
- [Nike: Reuse-A-Shoe](#) - Athletic Shoes Only, Any Brand
- [Patagonia: Common Threads](#) - Patagonia Brand Only
- [Puma: Bring Me Back](#) - Any Shoe Type, Any Brand
- [The North Face: Clothes the Loop](#) - Any Brand

A Unique Corporate Commitment to Reducing Textiles

Check out Patagonia's [Common Threads Partnership](#), a corporate view on producing quality, durable goods and promoting buying less.

Some Additional Online Textile Reuse Outlets

Consider donating your goods to Goodwill Industries, Salvation Army, Vietnam Veterans of America, or some other organization.

[Donationtown](#) - helps you find a charity in your area that will pick up your donation for free.

[Bra Recyclers](#) - a textile recycling company that specializes in the recycling and reuse of used and unused bras. The bras are distributed around the world through exporters and Bra Recycling Ambassadors to deserving women and girls in transition.

[Soles-4-Souls](#) - a non-profit organization that encourages reusable shoe collection events at schools and through community groups. The shoes are then sent to developing countries.

[The National Odd Shoe Exchange](#) - will accept donations of NEW single shoes for folks needing only one shoe - great if your dog ate one of your new shoes!

The Basics: Textile Collection and Processing



Many businesses and non-profits want your textiles for reuse and recycling into new products. Collection methods range from donation centers, thrift/consignment stores, donation boxes, curbside programs, and retail stores to fundraising events.

Collected textiles are then sorted into different grades and types of materials from reusable, resalable goods, or recyclable to non-usable goods. Almost half (45%) of collected textiles are sold and reused as secondhand apparel, 30% of materials are remade into wiping and polishing cloths, and 20% are reprocessed into fiber materials according to [SMART](#). The remaining 5% is unusable and is discarded. Charities, thrift stores, and consignment stores benefit mostly from the usable goods which are either donated or sold domestically. The unusable goods are then sent to rag sorters and processing facilities to further sort these materials.

The textile reuse and recycling industry involves various different players including textile manufacturers, retailers, consumers, collectors and processors, and end-markets. While ultimately the goal is to recover textiles, collectors have different approaches to operating their programs - for-profit entities, non-profit or charitable entities, and hybrid models.

For-profit entities get paid for textiles that they collect either at a brick and mortar store, curbside, or onsite at a partnering organization or fundraising event. These entities may sort, grade and bale textiles readying the materials for different markets. Consignment shops accept materials they can sell, and make a profit by receiving a portion of the sale price of items sold for clients. Unsold textiles are either returned to the client or donated to another entity. Other entities collect curbside or onsite as part of an agreement with a

community or organization. The partnering entity may receive a portion of the proceeds on a per pound basis if such an agreement is reached, however most of the profits go to the collector. Textiles are then sold to markets such as clothing for reuse or processed into secondary materials markets such as wiping rags, car seats or pillow stuffing.

Non-profit or charitable organizations are often connected to a social mission. Textiles may be collected on site at a non-profit or retail/thrift stores, curbside, or at drop-boxes. Donated materials in good condition may be funneled directly to clients or sold in thrift stores, the revenue supporting charitable programs. Some charitable organizations deal directly with a specific cause, such as a battered woman's shelter, and only want textiles in good condition which can be passed on directly to their clients. Other organizations operate their own thrift stores - donated textiles are sold and revenue goes to support the organization's mission. Any clothing not sold in the store may be baled and sold to brokers or directly to markets overseas or domestically. If the charitable organization does not have a thrift store, often the textiles are sold to a for-profit company and the revenue supports programming.

Hybrid organizations are a combination of the above, where the collector may buy donated textiles from a charitable organization and sell for profit directly to a reuse or recycling market or at a retail store. In this scenario, the charity lends its name to the textile collector.

A sampling of products made from recycled textiles include [denim insulation](#), [fabrics](#), [wiping cloths and rags](#), [household goods](#), and car seat stuffing. Other examples can be found on the SMART [fact sheet](#) for educators and kids.

Resources on Processing Textiles

[All About Textile Recycling](#) (SMART) video (3:03)

[Fiber Side of Textile Recycling](#) (SMART) video (3:58)

The State of Textiles in the US

- Approximately 5.5% of the municipal solid waste stream is textiles (clothing, footwear, towels, sheets, and pillowcases). [U.S. EPA](#)
- Recycling in the United States results in 2 million tons of textiles recovered, equivalent to one million cars taken off the road per year. [U.S. EPA](#)
- For every 10,000 tons of reclaimed textiles, 85 jobs are created [ILSR](#)

Imagine the resources that could be conserved if we reduced, reused, and recycled textiles that are currently ending up in the trash. CT municipalities and taxpayers could save approximately \$5.7 million in disposal tipping fees if all textiles were reused and recycled!

Setting Up Textiles Collection in my Municipality, Business, or School

The Northeast Recycling Council provides how-to steps and key questions to think about when developing a textiles collection program in the Collecting Textiles – Make it Work For Your Community Blog [Part 1](#) and [Part 2](#). NERC's blog also helps you calculate the approximate costs of disposing textiles in your community.

SMART is an international trade association for mixed post-consumer textile manufacturers, graders, sorters, and recyclers, and has developed resources for educators and municipalities for promoting textile recovery including [Videos and PSAs](#), [Media Kit](#), [Infographic Banners](#), and a [model ordinance](#).

Check out [Connecticut's Donation Bin Law](#) (CGS Section 21a-430) and SMART's [Collection Bin Operator Code of Conduct](#) video for suggestions on how to regulate collection bins in your community.

Alternative Collection

Textiles are a very easy material to recover from our homes and our communities. As businesses, we can help coordinate community drives or collection events for our employees. Collecting textiles for reuse and recycling can keep materials out of the waste stream, provide clothing and other textiles at low cost to others and possibly raise funds for your community or organization.

Fundraisers and Textile Drives

Many textile collectors offer standard or custom events and fundraising programs for communities, schools, athletic teams, or other organizations. The textile collection drives generally involve hosting collection bins or a trailer on site for an agreed upon timeframe and promoting the event to drum up excitement and participation. There is generally no cost to the hosting community or school, and the textile collection company will send a check for an agreed upon price per pound of textiles collected. The goal for both partnering entities is collecting and recovering textiles and raising money - it's a win-win



Bridgeport's "[Rag Man](#)" - Hyman Charmitz with his horse "Bob".

scenario!

Many of CT's colleges and universities are committed to textile reuse and recycling through Move-Out Day events where they collect textiles and furniture from students on an annual or semi-annual basis. Learn about the different models for the collection of materials on campus and examples of active programs from DEEP's [College and University Recycling Resources](#).

One of the oldest materials collected at the curb, rag collectors used to drive around communities – urban and rural – and collect rags.

Look for an [organization to partner with](#) for your next textile collection drive under the Where Can I Recycle My Textiles section above.

Swapping Events and Online Swap Programs

Reusing textiles has never been so fun! By hosting or attending a community-wide clothing or textile swap event or small gathering with friends you are keeping someone else's belongings alive. Swap events can be informal or formal, require an entrance fee which is donated to a charity, or entice participants by offering cocktails and spa treatments. There are also plenty of online swap programs from kids clothing to high-end couture. The options are endless! For more ideas, including how to set up your own clothing swap check out these resources:

[The Center for a New American Dream](#) provides guidance on how to set up your own swap event.

[The Swapaholics](#)

[Swap](#)

[Karma Couture](#)

[Recycle My Shoes](#) - a for-profit company that sells used shoes on-line.

[Big Wardrobe](#)

[Rehash](#)

Protect Yourself and Your Business

Fraud in the textiles industry does exist - textile collectors may misrepresent where the collected goods are being sent, the beneficiary of the collected materials, and whether or not the organization is for-profit or non-profit. It is realistic to expect transparency and good practices by all parties involved in textile collection, reuse and recycling. Organizations interested in working in CT should understand specific requirements on conducting business in the state. As a consumer, community, or local government, there are a few steps that you can take to protect yourself from fraudulent activities or organizations.

Have you done your homework?

Research the textile collector or recycler before signing a contract or entering into an agreement with them. Find out if they are working with other communities and what services they are providing. Ask for and contact references and visit their location to see the process in action. Ask them what types of materials are accepted – some collectors will collect all textiles (excluding wet, oily, or mildewed materials) while others are specific in what they want. Find out what they do with the materials collected, what markets textiles are sent to, if they are partnering with another organization, and if the revenue is for charitable or for-profit purposes. Members of SMART must abide by the Collection Bin Operator Code of Conduct ([pdf](#); [video](#)). If the textile collector is not a member, use [SMART's Collection Bin Operator Code of Conduct](#) and [CT's Donation Bin Law](#) as guidance for regulating companies with drop boxes.

Is the company you're working with licensed in Connecticut?

Check on the State of CT's Department of Consumer Protection [E-License Look-up](#) and search under "Charity" to see if the organization has an active license to work in the state.

Is the organization you're working with in good standing?

A number of independent Charity Review Services help rate local and national charities.

[Charity Navigator](#)

[Guidestar](#)

[Charity Watch](#)

[Better Business Bureau Wise Giving Alliance](#)

Has permission been granted for donation bins to be placed on public property? Are the bins properly labeled?

Per [CT's Donation Bin Law](#), textile collection organizations must obtain permission to place donation bins on public property. The bins must also be clearly and appropriately labeled otherwise the organization may be subject to a fine.

Properly Label Your Bins and Provide Clear Disclosure.

Summary of CT's Donation Bin Law

[CGS Section 21a-430](#)

Bin operators need permission to put a bin in a public place. Bins must be labeled with specific information in 2" block letters.

If the bin belongs to a charitable organization, it must specify:

- Name of nonprofit
- Name of owner/operator of bin



- Public may contact Department of Consumer Protection for more information
- How the charity benefits (recommended)

If the bin does not belong to a charitable organization, it must specify that donation is not for charitable purposes.

Relevant CT Laws

The CT Department of Consumer Protection enforces the Solicitation of Charitable Funds Act (SCFA) ([CGS Section 21a-190a et seq.](#)) which requires charities to be registered and abide by certain financial reporting requirements. The SCFA also requires charities working with commercial entities to obtain a written agreement specifying certain terms and submit the agreement to the CT Department of Consumer Protection. The CT Department of Consumer Protection and the Office of the Attorney General also enforce the Connecticut Unfair Trade Practices Act (CUTPA) ([CGS 42-110b et seq.](#)) which prohibits unfair methods of competition and unfair or deceptive acts or practices in trade or commerce.

Protect Your Community: Do you know of an illegitimately placed donation bin in your community?

The Connecticut Department of Consumer Protection will handle any complaints regarding public charities engaged in fraud, scam or misrepresentation through their [standard complaint procedures](#).

Additional Textile Resources

In June 2013, the [Solid Waste Management Advisory Committee](#) (SWAC) hosted a panel discussion on Textiles Reuse and Recycling to address increasing the capture of textiles from Connecticut's waste stream. [Presentations](#) from that discussion on the current state of textiles in CT, textile reuse and recycling industry sectors, related CT laws, and textile stakeholder perspectives can be found on DEEP's SWAC webpage.

[MA Department of Environmental Protection, Textiles Resources](#)

Access presentation materials and resources from the [Northeast Recycling Council's Workshop on Collecting Textiles](#): Making it Work for Your Community

[Bureau of International Recycling / Textiles Division](#)

[American Reusable Textile Association](#)

[Institute for Local Self Reliance, Weaving Textile Reuse into Waste Reduction](#)

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