



Module: Rethink

Introduction

In this module students will learn about the first “R” in the Region’s Waste Management Hierarchy – Rethink. Rethink requires us to consider the products we bring home including how products were produced, where the materials came from, and if they are sustainable. The future of waste management in Durham Region includes rethinking the traditional linear waste management model (take-make-dispose) and transitioning to a system of closed loops (circular economy). Students are encouraged to be thoughtful about buying items that can be more easily re-used, shared, or repaired to support a circular economy.

Learning Objectives

1. Define Rethink
2. Illustrate where Rethink falls within the Region’s Waste Management Hierarchy
3. Explain the benefits of Rethink practices
4. Describe Rethink options and provide examples

Resource Materials (located in the resource folder)

Videos:

- Durham Region’s five “Rs”
- Rethink
- Circular Economy

Infographics:

- 5Rs in the Waste Hierarchy
- What is a circular economy?

What is Rethink?

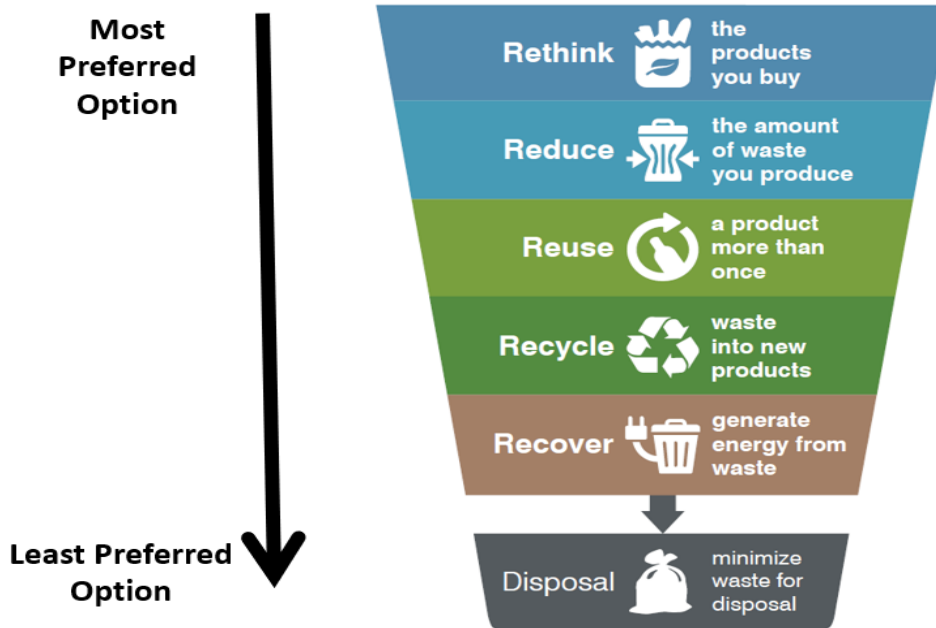
Rethink is the first “R” in the Region’s Waste Management Hierarchy. Rethink focuses how we view and use natural resources with the understanding that natural resources are limited. Rethink means challenging our current policies, processes, and actions, and focusing on innovative ways to redesign and improve systems to better the environment and the economy. The goal of rethink is to retain and recover as much value as possible from materials and products and significantly decrease or eliminate the need for disposal.

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5Rs in the waste hierarchy



What are the benefits of rethinking waste?

Rethinking waste moves us towards a more sustainable, greener future with significant environmental, economic and social benefits.

Rethinking waste:

- Inspires innovation and challenges us to redesign and improve systems
- Increases the security of the supply of natural resources by decreasing the need to harvest and process new raw materials
- Improves the quality and longevity of products
- Reduces pressure on the environment by decreasing or eliminating activities related to consumer goods such as resources extraction, transportation, processing and disposal
- Delays the need to purchase new equipment and expand waste management infrastructure
- Saves energy and money

Rethink practices

Rethink requires us to ask questions and to think critically about the systems and products that we use and purchase. This includes considering the entire lifespan of the product including:

- The natural resources that are used to produce the product
- How the resources are extracted and shipped to be refined
- What manufacturing requirements are necessary to produce the product
- What packaging is used to protect and market the product
- How the finished product is shipped to markets
- If the product can easily be reused, shared, or repaired
- How the product is managed at the end of its lifecycle

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Some ways to rethink waste include:

- Avoid unnecessary products
- Make items yourself when possible
- Consider using second-hand items first - share, lend, rent or lease items
- Choose companies that support repairs and take-back packaging or products after they are used
- Fix items or choose restored products instead of new ones
- Reuse or upcycle used household items
- Look for items with less packaging
- Choose products made from recycled materials

Before making a purchase, consider how products were produced, where the materials came from, and if they are sustainable. This includes products that are durable, reusable, repairable, fully recyclable or compostable, and easily disassembled

Consider environmentally friendly alternatives when possible, including avoiding harmful chemicals and substances

We can work towards making a positive impact on our planet and its future by raising community awareness that natural resources are limited, being more aware of the amount of waste we create and making informed decisions about the products we purchase – reducing waste before it is even created. To learn more about waste reduction, visit the Region's module on the second "R" – Reduce!

Conclusion

It takes a lot of energy and materials to make new products, to get these products to people who want to buy them, then to process or dispose of these products when they are no longer needed or wanted. Often, this process is not sustainable. Rethinking aims to reexamine how we view natural resources, with an understanding that these resources are limited, maintain as much value as possible from materials and products, and reduce or remove the need for disposal.