



## Module: Rethink

### Introduction

In this module students will explore the first “R” in the Region’s Waste Management Hierarchy: Rethink. This concept requires us to reconsider the products we bring into our homes, including how they are made, where their materials come from, and whether they are sustainable. In Durham Region, we’re moving away from the traditional linear waste management model of “take-make-dispose” to a system of closed loops called the circular economy. This means thinking carefully about buying items that can be reused, shared, or repaired to help create a more sustainable world.

### 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:

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

### Waste Management Hierarchy

The Region uses a Waste Management Hierarchy as a framework that aims to help us rethink our relationship with waste based on five priorities ranked in terms of what is best for the environment. The most preferred option is positioned at the top of the hierarchy, while the least preferred option is at the bottom of the hierarchy.

### 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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## 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 critically evaluate the systems and products that we use and purchase throughout their entire lifecycle. Before buying something new, think about the product's production methods, material sources, and overall sustainability. Look for durable, reusable, repairable, recyclable, or compostable options and explore using environmentally friendly alternatives that avoid harmful substances.

This evaluation encourages us to considering every stage of a product's life, such as:

- Natural resources used to make the product.
- Extraction and transportation methods of those resources for processing.
- Manufacturing processes involved in production.
- Packaging designed to protect and market the product.
- Shipping methods use to distribute the finished products to markets.
- Potential for reusing, sharing, or repairing the product.
- Management of the product once it reaches the end of its lifecycle.

Some ways to rethink waste include:

- Avoid unnecessary products.
- Make items yourself when possible.
- Use second-hand items: share, lend, rent or lease items.
- Support companies that offer repairs and take-back options.
- Choose refurbished products over new ones.
- Reuse or upcycle used household items.
- Select items with less packaging.
- Choose products made from recycled materials.

By increasing community awareness about limited natural resources and making informed purchasing decisions, we can reduce waste before it is created. To learn more about waste reduction, visit the Region's module on the second "R" – Reduce!

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## Conclusion

Creating new products requires a lot of energy and materials, and the process of getting them to consumers and eventually disposing of them is often unsustainable. Rethinking encourages us to reimagine our relationship with natural resources, aiming to retain their value and reduce waste.