



Module: Reuse

Introduction

North America is often viewed as a “throw-away society”. This means consumers often choose products and packaging that are designed to be used only once before they are thrown away. This is not a sustainable practice. In this module, students will learn about Reuse.

Reuse is the third “R” in the Region’s Waste Management Hierarchy. Reuse is a great way to divert materials away from the waste stream, decreasing the amount of waste that needs to be managed or disposed of as garbage. With our growing population, and the increased environmental stress on the world around us, we all have an important role to play to help decrease waste in our community.

Learning Objectives

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

Resource Materials (located in the resource folder)

Videos:

- Durham Region’s five “Rs”
- Food Waste Prevention Playlist
- Circular Economy

Infographics:

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

What is Reuse?

Reuse is the third “R” in the Region’s Waste Management Hierarchy, after Rethink and Reduce. Reuse means using an item as many times as possible. Items can be reused either for their original purpose or for something different!

Reuse is preferable to recycling because these items do not need to be reprocessed before they can be used again. Before purchasing items, it is important to consider how these products will be used and if there are reusable options available that will prolong the need for disposal. Making purchasing decisions with product reuse in mind helps to decrease waste before it is created.

What are the benefits of Reuse?

Reuse practices (such as repurposing, selling, and donating items) helps to prolong, or eliminate, the need to dispose of the materials. This means less waste that needs to be managed.

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Some of the benefits of reuse include:

- Prolonging the lifecycle of the product.
- Reducing the pollution and environmental impacts associated with producing new products. This includes harvesting and processing new raw materials, transportation, and waste management requirements when these items are no longer needed or wanted.
- Saving energy and money.
- Improving socio-economical access to goods.

Reuse practices

There are several ways that we can keep materials out of the waste stream and extend the lifespan of the items we buy and use. Some common reuse practices are discussed below.

Reuse

Reuse includes avoiding the use of disposable products by choosing reusable items instead. This includes items such as reusable mugs, dishes, cloth napkins, and metal utensils (like forks, spoons, and knives) instead of single-use disposable paper or plastic cups, plates, napkins, and utensils. There are many great reusable products in the market to help you reduce the amount of waste you create at home. Some additional examples are listed below.

- Refillable containers such as food containers, water bottles, mugs, and soap dispensers
- Mesh produce bags
- Rechargeable batteries
- Beeswax wrap
- Cotton bowl covers
- Reusable storage bags
- Silicone baking mats
- Dryer balls
- Reusable shopping bag
- Linen bread bags
- Metal tea strainers and coffee filters
- Cloth diapers

Donate, Sell and Hand-down

Items you no longer need or want can still hold value. Donating or selling these items is a great way to keep them out of the waste stream and provides an opportunity for these items to find a new home. There is a growing number of online platforms to post items for sale, and numerous local non-profit and for-profit organizations where you can donate gently used items. Another great option for items that you have outgrown (such as clothing, sporting goods, books, and toys) is to hand them down to a younger family member or friend for them to use and enjoy.

Upcycle

Upcycling typically refers to taking an item and making it into a better-quality product. After upcycling, the item may be used for a similar purpose that now looks new and/or improved or may be used in a creative new way. Some examples of upcycling include using fabric scrapes to make a rug or tote

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bags, making coasters from old bottle corks, and using empty cans to make plant pots or pencil holders.

Repurpose

Repurposing means taking an item that was originally meant for one purpose and using it as something else. If an item no longer serves its original purpose, you may be able to reinvent its purpose. This is a great opportunity to use your creativity to transform waste into treasure.

Refurbish and Repair

When refurbishing an item, the aim is to restore it back to its original working condition and sometimes includes making additional improvements. Repairing typically aims to repair an item back to good working order but not necessarily back to its original state. Some examples of items that can often be refurbished include electronics such as laptops, desktops and tablets, phones, televisions, small appliances like vacuums, and video game consoles. While refurbishing and repairing may require some new parts, these efforts help prolong the lifecycle of an item and keeps them away from the waste stream.

Conclusion

Before purchasing an item, it is important to consider how the product will be used and if there is a reusable option available that will prolong the need for disposal. Making informed purchasing decisions will help decrease waste before it's created. Once you have purchased an item, consider using it for as long as possible. When you are ready to get rid of an item, ask yourself if there is a way to prolong its use by passing it along to someone new. We all have an important role to play in waste management to help decrease our impact on the environment and the community, practicing reuse can help!