

Energy and Recycling Committee (ERC) News

Our goal is to increase municipal recycling from our current rate of 29% to 35% by 2017 and 40% by 2019

From Blue Bin to New Life: What Our Recyclables Become

The City of South Portland is committed to becoming a municipal leader in Maine by reducing its carbon footprint by decreasing energy consumption and increasing recycling. An important part of this effort is recycling household materials. We know you're doing your part because recycling rates are increasing, so what happens to all those materials we're so carefully sorting?

Rest assured, all of the materials you are recycling are destined for a new purpose. After your recyclables are picked up curbside or at recycling locations, they are then transported to the Ecomaine facility in Portland, where they are sorted using a variety of processes, and then baled and sold on the commodities market as raw materials. Each ton of "waste" recycled saves the city \$70.50, and is transformed into a wide range of useful products by manufacturers who use it in lieu of new or virgin material.

Though our recyclables are collected altogether, the materials are sorted and baled in separate categories, including cardboard, aluminum, steel/tin, glass, and different types of plastics and papers.

Here are just some of the new products made from each type of recycled material:

Newspaper gets made into egg cartons, building insulation, construction paper, berry boxes, paperboard (think cereal boxes), kitty litter, sheetrock, paper plates, new newspaper, and fast food takeout cup trays.

Magazines get made into paperboard, newspaper, and telephone directories.

#1 Plastic beverage bottles get made into polar fleece clothing and blankets, carpeting, backpacks, sleeping bags and cold weather jacket insulation.

#2 Plastics get made into composite decking and building materials, playground sets, detergent bottles, buckets, toys, stadium seats, bins and containers.

Aluminum cans get made into new aluminum cans over and over again.

Glass bottles and jars get made into new bottles and jars, and fiberglass insulation.

Office paper gets made into tissue and toilet paper, new computer and notebook paper, paper towels and napkins.

Steel and tin cans get made into bicycle parts, car parts, steel beams, rebar, appliances, and new cans.

Paperboard gets made into paper backing for roofing shingles, paper towel tubes, and new paperboard.

Corrugated cardboard gets made into paper bags, paperboard, and new cardboard.

Interesting Facts:

- Some materials, such as glass, aluminum, and steel, can be recycled indefinitely. Paper has a finite number of recycling cycles because of deterioration of its fiber length and bonds. Fine paper requires stronger fiber bonding, for example, whereas tissue and newspaper can accommodate weaker bonds.
- While many recycled materials are sold to companies in other states and in Canada, some are sold to companies right here in Maine for remanufacturing. Cascades Auburn Fiber turns different types of paper back into pulp, which is sold to paper product manufacturers across Maine and the Northeast to be made into new products. Huhtamaki Paper in the Waterville area makes recycled paper into paper plates and other consumer goods.
- Aluminum can be recycled into a variety of products, including automobile bodies. However, because of high demand, it is usually made into new aluminum cans, which can be back on store shelves in as few as 60 days after being recycled.

When you have a choice, always buy products with recycled content. This creates greater demand for recycled goods and is an important part of the solution. For more information on recycling and what recyclables are made into, go to ecomaine.org or to maine.gov/dep/waste/recycle/whatrecyclablesbecome.html.

The South Portland Energy and Recycling Committee meets the third Wednesday of each month at the South Portland Community Center. Meetings start at 6:30 p.m. and are open to the public.