Recycling in Idaho: Frequently Asked Questions

What is recycling?

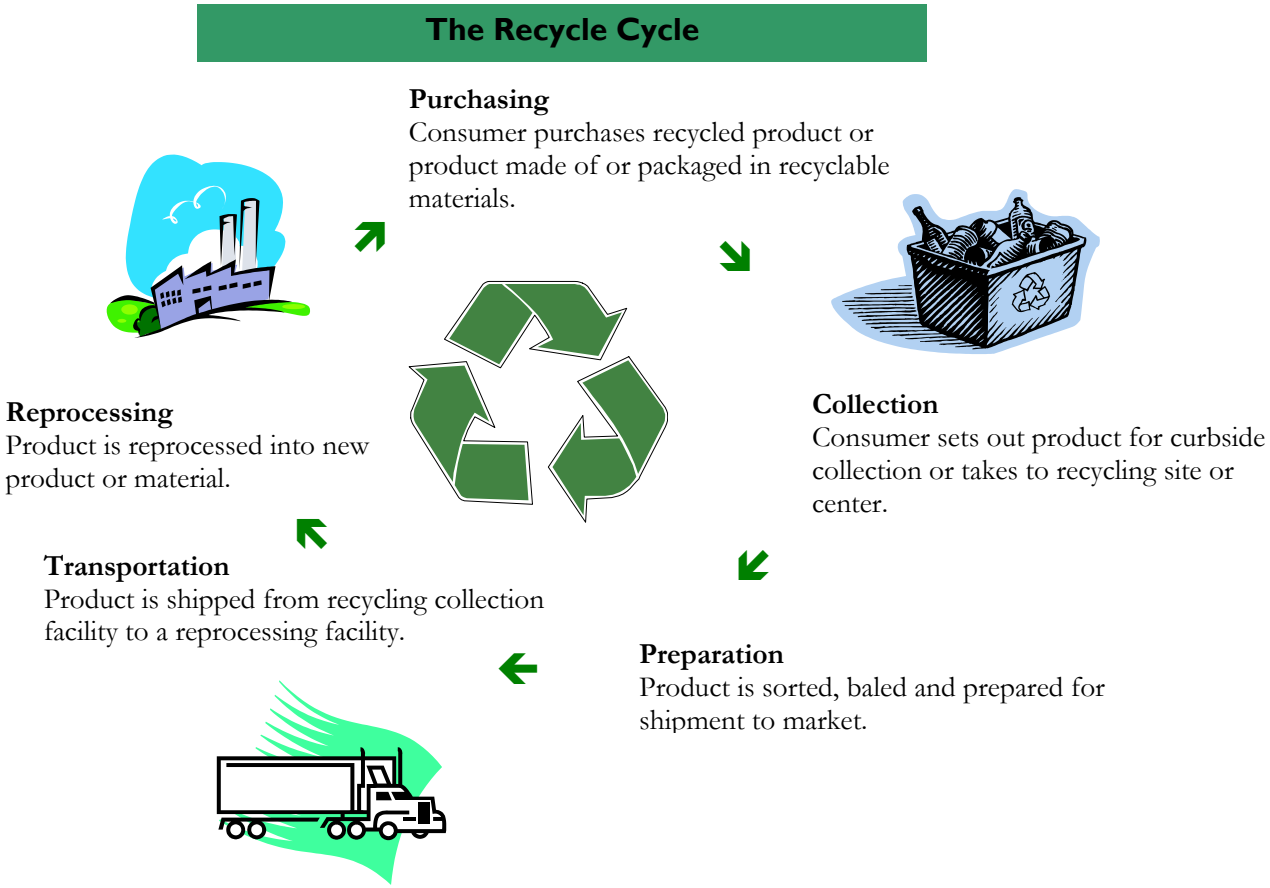
Recycling is the process of transforming waste materials into useable resources. It is the second preferred waste management option established by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The first priority is pollution prevention—not creating waste in the first place. Other alternatives to managing waste are treatment and disposal or release.

Why recycle?

Recycling is preferable to treatment and disposal because it helps conserve energy and reduce waste. Much less energy is needed to make recycled materials into new products than is needed with new, "virgin" raw materials. Recycling also helps conserve natural resources and prevent pollution. Manufacturing using recovered materials is usually much cleaner than manufacturing products from new resources. Recycling also helps avoid the costs of disposing of waste in landfills or incinerators and creates jobs in areas where reprocessing facilities are located.

How does recycling work?

Recycling is a five-stage closed-loop process. As depicted below, it begins with the purchase of recycled products or products that are made of or packaged in materials that can be recycled. The products are then collected for recycling, prepared and shipped to market, where they are reprocessed into new products or materials.



Who is in charge of recycling in Idaho?

Recycling, like garbage collection in Idaho, is an optional service provided at the discretion of local governments or by private recycling companies. Although the state has no mandated waste diversion goal, pollution prevention and recycling are supported and encouraged through public education and outreach activities conducted by the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ).

What kinds of recycling programs are available in Idaho?

Because recycling services are under the jurisdiction of local governments, recycling programs vary widely, depending upon availability and proximity to reprocessing facilities and markets for recyclable materials. The four major types of recycling programs in Idaho include:

✓ **Curbside Collection**
Some communities have partnered with private trash hauling companies to provide curbside collection of recyclable materials, along with garbage, for their residents. This is the most convenient collection method. Curbside collection is efficient in densely populated areas where large volumes of recyclable materials can be collected in each truckload. The cost of collection may outweigh the value of the recyclable materials collected, however. Collection costs may be included in residents' solid waste bills or subsidized with local tax dollars.

✓ **Community Drop-Off Sites**
In other communities, recycling drop-off sites with large containers may be available to residents. The drop-off sites may be sponsored by the local community or a community organization and are often located in public or supermarket parking lots. Although not as convenient as curbside collection, drop-off sites are a more economical method of providing recycling service, especially in rural areas. Collection costs are lower and may be subsidized with local tax dollars or donated by local community organizations.

✓ **Household Hazardous Waste Programs**
Some communities and landfills offer household hazardous waste (HHW) programs for residents and small businesses. These programs collect wastes that are potentially dangerous to human health and the environment such as oils, solvents, paints, batteries and metals. If possible, the wastes are recycled. If the product cannot be recycled, it may be treated to isolate the toxic parts and/or disposed of using additional containment measures.

✓ **Private Recycling Centers**
In yet other areas, private recycling companies maintain facilities where they collect and bale recycled products for shipment to market. Residents may drop off recyclables at these centers, often receiving nominal payment for the materials they bring in.

What communities offer curbside recycling in Idaho?

Curbside recycling of common household products, such as newspaper, cans, and plastic, is available to most households in Ada County, including residents of Boise, Eagle, Garden City, Kuna, Meridian, and Star, and the unincorporated areas of the county. Lewiston and Moscow also provide curbside recycling service for their residents.

Learn more about recycling opportunities in Idaho in DEQ's Idaho Recycling Directory.

Why are recycling options limited in Idaho?

Like any other enterprise, recycling is a business. To survive, it must be profitable for those who own and run the business. Also like any other business, recycling depends upon supply and demand. Often, supply and demand of recyclable materials are out-of-sync in today's world economy, which results in volatile markets and unstable prices for recyclable materials.

Recycling in Idaho is limited by its geographic isolation from reprocessing facilities and markets. Recyclable materials must be shipped long distances, which can be very costly, especially for heavy materials like glass. Collection and transportation costs can outweigh the value of the recyclable materials.

Recycling in Idaho is also limited by the relatively low cost of disposal. In states where landfill space is limited and disposal costs are high, there is a strong economic incentive to recycle because it is often cheaper than throwing products in the trash. Traditionally, Idaho has benefited from ample landfill space, which has kept disposal costs low. As a result, it is often cheaper to dispose of products than to recycle them. During the 1990s, many smaller landfills were closed because of new, more stringent environmental standards developed by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Despite fewer landfills, disposal fees have remained low compared to neighboring states. As existing landfills fill up, however, it will be necessary to build new landfills, which are very expensive to construct. Higher disposal fees will be needed to cover the cost of building new landfills, which may tip the economic incentive to recycling and pollution prevention.

How can I find out about recycling opportunities in my community?

Refer to DEQ's Idaho Recycling Directory to find out about local recycling opportunities. Also, your local government may be able to help. Start with your city's public works department where many municipal sanitation programs are administered. In addition, your trash hauler may also be able to provide information on recycling in your area.

What can I do?

Minimize Waste. Reuse items, buy products in bulk to reduce packaging, and be a careful consumer to reduce the amount of waste you generate.

Buy Recycled. Buying recycled products will help create markets for recycled goods.

Recycle What You Can. Refer to DEQ's Idaho Recycling Directory to find out what products can be recycled in your area.

Recycle Non-Traditional Items. Look for recycling opportunities for non-traditional products. For example, many packages are cushioned with styrofoam peanuts. Some mailing companies collect these peanuts and reuse them, saving them money and keeping this product out of the landfill. Similarly, many grocery stores collect plastic shopping bags and garden stores often take plastic plant containers.

Volunteer. Is your recycling collection site community-run? See if you can volunteer to help out with a community collection day.

Pay for Recycling Services. Some recycling options may cost money. By paying for these services, you can support recycling and keep waste out of the landfill. For example, most computer manufacturers offer computer recycling services. For a small fee, they will pick up and ship your old PCs to a facility for reprocessing. Visit their websites for more information.

For More Information

Idaho Department of Environmental Quality	www.deq.idaho.gov
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency	www.epa.gov/epaoswer/osw/rrr.htm