



Source Reduction – What You Can Do

What You Need to Know

The Facts

In 2017, Marylanders generated 7 million tons of Maryland Recycling Act (MRA) waste (MRA waste is waste that, if recycled, counts towards a county's recycling rate). That is enough waste to build a 3-foot by 6-foot wall 3,975 miles long, or the same distance from Baltimore to San Diego and halfway back again. The recycling rate plus the source reduction (SR) credit make up the waste diversion rate. Through the efforts of citizens, businesses, and government agencies, Maryland achieved a statewide waste diversion rate of 48.4% in 2017 (the last year data is available). The 48.4% waste diversion rate was composed of a 44.1% MRA recycling rate and a 4.3% SR credit.

What is Source Reduction? Simply stated, source reduction is the elimination of waste before it is created. It involves the design, manufacture, purchase, or use of materials and products to reduce the amount or toxicity of what is thrown away. Source reduction can go a long way to reducing the costs associated with the transportation, disposal or recycling of waste. Best of all, practicing source reduction can save you money!

What Can You Do?

At Home

- ✓ Replace incandescent light bulbs with energy-efficient long-lasting LED light bulbs.
- ✓ Use rechargeable batteries whenever possible. For best results, look for a rechargeable battery with a capacity of at least: 200 mAh – 9V; 800 mAh – AAA; 2000 mAh – AA; 5000 mAh – C; and 10,000 mAh – D.
- ✓ Donate unwanted items to local non-profits (like clothing, equipment, furniture, appliances, etc.).
- ✓ Repair older items rather than purchasing new ones.
- ✓ Reupholster furniture instead of purchasing new pieces.
- ✓ Use cloth towels, napkins and rags instead of disposable paper products that cannot be recycled.
- ✓ Avoid using disposable cups, plates and cutlery. In fact, in Maryland a person may not sell or offer for sale in the state an expanded polystyrene (EPS) food service product as of July 1, 2020.
- ✓ Save bows, tissue paper, polystyrene peanuts, gift boxes, and newspaper to wrap gifts in the future.
- ✓ Read books on an e-reader or tablet instead of purchasing a hard copy of the book.
- ✓ Consider subscribing to electronic newspapers and magazines.

- ✓ Donate back issues of magazines to schools for use in school projects or to a doctor's office for patients to read.
- ✓ Use scrap paper for store lists, phone messages, art projects, and children's artwork.
- ✓ Use thermoses and reusable containers for the food in your packed lunch.
- ✓ Opt out of the delivery of telephone directories. www.yellowpagesoptout.com.
- ✓ Reduce the amount of junk mail you receive at home by opting out using the following website: www.consumer.ftc.gov/articles/0262-stopping-unsolicited-mail-phone-calls-and-email.
- ✓ To stop catalogs, call the company's toll-free number and have the mailing label handy.
- ✓ Reuse disposable plastic bags for collecting dog waste and cat litter.
- ✓ Rent instead of buy infrequently used tools or equipment.

At the Store

- ✓ Use cloth or mesh bags to hold your purchases when shopping.
- ✓ Return hangers to dry cleaners for reuse.
- ✓ Purchase items in concentrated form, bulk, or economy sizes that use the least amount of packaging. In addition to being cheaper and using less packaging, the use of these items eliminates the waste associated with many of the food containers used on single-serving items that cannot be recycled.
- ✓ Purchase items in containers that have other uses.
- ✓ Purchase high-quality, long-lasting products.
- ✓ Purchase non-toxic items whenever possible.

In the Yard

- ✓ Start a backyard composting pile or use a composting bin to process organic wastes from your kitchen and yard. Finished compost can be used as a soil amendment to improve soil quality in gardens or flowerbeds or as a top dressing for lawn areas.
- ✓ Leave grass trimmings on your lawn area (grasscycling) to add nutrients back into the soil.
- ✓ Plant perennials instead of annuals that will have to be disposed of at the end of the year.
- ✓ Start an indoor redworm composter to process organic wastes from your kitchen. Finished compost can be used to pot or fertilize houseplants.
- ✓ Chip old, broken, or dead branches and trees and use the resulting mulch in your yard.
- ✓ Use alternatives in landscape design such as mulch islands, natural areas, and ground covers.
- ✓ See MDE's composting page for additional information: <https://mde.maryland.gov/programs/LAND/RecyclingandOperationsprogram/Pages/composting.aspx>.