RECYCLING
Indiana State Fair Recycling Education Booth

THE FACTS

Municipal Solid Waste
- In 2009, Americans produced about 250 million tons of municipal solid waste, or about 4.4 pounds per person per day.

Why Recycle?
- Saves natural resources
- Prevents air and water pollution
- Saves energy
- Provides raw materials for industry
- Creates jobs
- Keeps habitats intact
- Saves landfill space

What Happens to Recyclables
- Processed at Material Recovery Facility
- Commingled recyclables are separated out using some mechanical and some human methods. Imagine a big pile of recyclables placed onto a long conveyor belt...
- The first conveyor belt is sticky and on an incline. Newspapers stick to it and continue to climb up the hill. Round objects, like steel/aluminum cans or plastic/glass bottles, roll backward. This step separates out paper material from containers.
- Magnets attract and isolate the steel cans, while an Eddy Current separates aluminum cans by repelling them away.
- Imagine a colored shampoo bottle and a clear water bottle are going down the conveyor belt. To separate them, the MRF shoots light from a powerful laser through the plastic. If the light goes through the plastic, like it would with a clear water bottle, a puff of air pushes the bottle off the conveyor belt.
- At the end of their route, all commodities have been thoroughly separated and are prepared for sale to manufacturers.
- Now they can be turned into products for purchase: plastic bottles, fleece jackets, paper tissue, plastic hangers, bicycles, and more.
- There are 717 recycling drop-off locations and 16 recycling facilities within 15 miles of the Indiana State Fairgrounds!
Management of MSW in the US, 2011 (EPA).

Total MSW Generation By Material, 2011 (EPA).
250 million tons (before recycling).
The majority of our trash can be recycled or composted!
THE QUESTIONS

Q. Is it true that anything with the chasing arrows on it means it’s recyclable in my community?
A. Most likely not. The recycling symbol is a reminder to recycle, not a promise that the material is recyclable. It’s important to ask your community recycling coordinator what is acceptable in your town.

Q. What do the three arrows in the recycling symbol stand for?
A. Collection of recyclables, process and manufacture the material, and buy recycled products. Just like any cycle, if one part doesn’t happen, the whole cycle won’t work!

Q. Should I leave the caps on or take them off of my water bottle before putting it in the recycling bin?
A. Leave them on. Historically, MRF’s didn’t want them as they could be an occupational hazard. But now many newer MRF’s have machines to puncture bottles prior to compaction so the air is taken out of a bottle, removing the occupational hazard. The lids are often a #5 polypropylene and currently have a good global market demand.

Q. Does the material in a landfill degrade?
A. Somewhat, but not really. The organic material within a landfill will degrade and generate methane, a greenhouse gas which in some landfills can be captured and used as a green energy source. However, light, air and water are needed for organic material to degrade fully. Landfill operators attempt to remove these things, essentially creating a tomb-like structure. It’s very hard for a non-organic product like metal or plastic to degrade in a landfill.

Q. Are landfills the only way to manage waste?
A. No. There are also transfer stations, waste-to-energy plants, composting facilities, and recycling facilities.

Q. How clean do items need to be before being recycled?
A. Empty, but not clean. No need to remove labels, staples, stickers, etc.