

# Recycling Online



## Putting reuse to use – Part 1

by Roger Guttentag

The bedrock catechism of waste management for the last 30 years has been the promotion of “reduce, reuse and recycle.”

Reduce and recycle have always struck me as straightforward concepts, though not necessarily straightforward to realize. Reduce simply means eliminating a specific amount of material inputs. One good example is the development of vacuum cleaners that didn’t need disposable filter bags to hold dirt and dust.

On the other hand, the basic idea behind recycling is to use existing post-consumer products to replace virgin material inputs – readers of this magazine can list numerous examples.

Reuse, by occupying the middle ground between reduce and recycle, can function to either reduce materials consumption by eliminating the need for materials in the first place or delaying the requirement for recycling or disposal by preserving the economic value of existing material products. Developing infrastructure to accomplish these objectives is explained in a feature in this issue (see page 21), and in that story definitions of reuse are discussed. This column will be focused on providing supplemental sources of information on how reuse has been successfully implemented. Bear in mind that since this is a broad topic survey, the links that are provided are generally only selective examples of what can be found through diligent searching.

## Reuse advocacy

While it’s safe to say that organizations and agencies that promote sustainability, zero waste and recycling also support the expansion of reuse, there are some organi-

zations that focus specifically on advocating on behalf of all the different forms of reuse through educational programs, technical support, policy development and general outreach efforts. The following organizations are highly recommended starting points for learning more on how reuse can be implemented and understanding its contribution to waste reduction and economic sustainability.

*Reuse Alliance* – This group originally began in 2005 as a reuse network located in the New York metropolitan area, and since 2009, it has been working to become a more national organization through the development of state chapters and pushing for state legislation and policies that support reuse development. The Reuse Alliance also hosted three national conferences on reuse, ReuseConex, from 2010 to 2014.

*Reuse Institute* – Based in Dayton, Ohio, the Reuse Institute is currently organizing the 2016 ReuseConex, to be held in Boston next fall, and it has developed a webinar training system called Master Reuser to be delivered through eight three-hour sessions.

*Reuse International* – This group emerged as a result of networking that occurred at ReuseConex 2014 in Austin, Texas, and it has developed into a reuse advocacy organization with an international focus. The organization is currently working on publishing educational toolkits for developing and sustaining reuse programs in 2015.

*ReUse Minnesota* – Focused on promoting reuse in the Land of 10,000 Lakes, ReUse Minnesota provides tools including professional networking, sponsorship of reuse events and general public outreach programs. It also supports reuse-friendly policies and legislation.

*Reuse* – This organization represents non-governmental and private initiatives that are actively involved in expanding reuse practices within the European Union and

insisting on stronger EU reuse policies and concrete implementation goals. Reuse position papers, which can be downloaded from the group’s site, cover a variety of topics such as the EU circular economy plan, the need for easier-to-repair products and the development of formal standards for reuse centers.

## Waste reduction through reuse

Reuse can contribute to the goal of actual waste reduction by replacing commercial or consumer single-use products with those that can go through multiple use cycles. The following organizations promote the use of products used for commercial, industrial or institutional applications:

*Reusable Industrial Packaging Association* – This organization represents manufacturers and re-conditioners of 55-gallon steel or plastic drums and 270- or 330-gallon intermediate bulk carriers (also referred to as IBCs).

*Reusable Packaging Association* – This group represents manufacturers of reusable packaging, such as bins, boxes, crates and pallets, used in supply chain operations. The Learning Center section of the group’s site provides public access to a number of useful information resources including industry overviews, labeled Reusables 101 and Reusables 102.

Other associations, meanwhile, promote reusable products for consumers:

*Reusable Bag Association* – This group was formed by some of the more prominent manufacturers of reusable bags and links to company members are provided on this site.

*The Real Diaper Association* – This association’s site provides information on cloth diaper services and advice for advocates within the United States and Canada. It also includes information on how to switch to cloth diapers and the environmental benefits of reusable diapers.

## Don't forget refillables

All beverages sold in the U.S., such as milk, soft drinks and beer, were sold in refillable bottles until shortly after the end of World War II. A history of that packaging protocol can be found on the Reduce, Reuse, Refill site from the Grass Roots Recycling Network and the Institute of Local Self Reliance. Data presented on this site as well as the Refillable Glass Bottles section of the Container Recycling Institute (CRI) site shows how the market share for refillable bottles declined sharply to an almost insignificant percentage by the end of the 1990s. Unfortunately, neither site has more recent information on refillable containers except for a 2009 report posted on the CRI site that was prepared for the Oregon Recycling Markets Development Corporation on the potential for a refillable bottle system. Nonetheless, these sites provide useful background for anyone interested in understanding the issues confronting refillable container products.

## Web Address Directory

Container Recycling Institute – Refillable glass bottles ..... [tinyurl.com/CRI-reuse](http://tinyurl.com/CRI-reuse)  
 Grassroots Recycling Network – Reduce, Reuse, Refill..... [refillables.grrn.org](http://refillables.grrn.org)  
 Real Simple – Best reusable water bottles..... [tinyurl.com/RealSimple-Reuse](http://tinyurl.com/RealSimple-Reuse)  
 Reusable Bag Association ..... [reusablebagassociation.org](http://reusablebagassociation.org)  
 Reusable Industrial Packaging Association..... [reusablepackaging.org](http://reusablepackaging.org)  
 Reusable Packaging Association ..... [reusables.org](http://reusables.org)  
 Reuse Alliance ..... [reusealliance.org](http://reusealliance.org)  
 Reuse Conex ..... [reuseconex.org](http://reuseconex.org)  
 Reuse Institute..... [reuseinstitute.org](http://reuseinstitute.org)  
 ReUse Minnesota..... [reusemn.org](http://reusemn.org)  
 Reuse.International..... [reuse.international](http://reuse.international)  
 Reuse ..... [rreuse.org](http://rreuse.org)  
 The Real Diaper Association ..... [realdiaperassociation.org](http://realdiaperassociation.org)  
 The Wirecutter – Best water bottles ..... [thewirecutter.com/reviews/best-water-bottle](http://thewirecutter.com/reviews/best-water-bottle)  
 Treehugger – Reusable menstrual products ..... [tinyurl.com/TH-Reuse](http://tinyurl.com/TH-Reuse)

## Next month

My discussion about reuse will continue with a review of how different reuse practices and strategies can reduce the need for product recycling or disposal.

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waste consultant located in Harleysville, Pennsylvania. He can be contacted at (610) 584-8836 or [rguttentag@comcast.net](mailto:rguttentag@comcast.net). Guttentag has a website, [recyclingandreuse.com](http://recyclingandreuse.com), which houses all of his Recycling On-line columns and other resources for recycling professionals of all stripes.

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