

# Textile Recycling and Re-purposing

Ever wonder what to do with your holey socks? A stained pair of jeans? That old jacket that we all know is so 10 years ago? Donate. Donate. Donate!

Textiles include a broad set of materials including clothing, sheets, pillows, blankets, drapes, shoes, belts, and even stuffed animals. We often assume we cannot donate these items if they are stained, or otherwise worn out, but we can!

The textile recycling industry is perhaps the oldest form of recycling and it has expanded. These days the textile recycling industry is sophisticated, thorough and global. And they are looking for all sorts of textile resources—not just our “gently used” items that can be resold at thrift shops.

There are many players in the textile recycling world. Many people know about the consignment shops that take nicer, gently worn clothes and put them back into use as clothing. Now, there are places such as Goodwill Industries, The Salvation Army, Red Cross, St. Vincent de Paul, Got Books, Planet Aid, and Bay State Textiles that welcome many other types of textiles every single day. The message from the industry today is - give us all of it, no sorting needed.

According to MassDEP, textiles make up five percent of the solid waste disposed in Massachusetts. In 2010, Massachusetts residents disposed of 230,000 tons of useful old clothing, footwear and other fabric materials. This means that the average Massachusetts resident is throwing away approximately 70 pounds of potentially useful material each year!<sup>i</sup>

Arlington residents seem to be getting the picture. In 2011, Arlington residents diverted 515 tons of useful, recyclable textiles by donating them to attended Goodwill donation centers. This saved the town over \$35,000 in tipping fees. However, the town could have saved an additional \$14,000 if residents had recycled the remaining 200 tons of textiles that MassDEP estimates was thrown out with the trash.

To put it into perspective, while the average Arlington resident recycled approximately 24 pounds of useful textiles to attended Goodwill donation centers in 2011, Concord and Lexington residents recycled 42 and 34 pounds, respectively. Arlington can do better!

Why should you donate clothes that are ripped or stained? Because these items might end up as wiping cloths in an automotive repair shop. In fact, there are lots of ways our used textiles can be re-purposed. Cotton can be made into rags or form a component for new high-quality paper. Knitted or woven woolens can be pulled into fibers that are used as car insulation or seat stuffing. Other types of fabric can be reprocessed into fibers for upholstery, insulation, and even building materials. Buttons and zippers are stripped off for reuse. Very little is left over at the end of the recycling process. The remaining natural materials, such as various grades of cotton, can be composted.<sup>ii</sup>

You can donate items that you would not expect - underwear, single shoes, bags, towels, drapes, belts, shoes, hats, backpacks, handbags, curtains, table linens, socks (including single socks and socks with holes) throw rugs, sleep wear, undergarments, pillows, and even stuffed animals. It all has a place and a re-purpose.

Are there any restrictions? Two simple ones: If textiles are wet, or contaminated with hazardous or human waste, put them in the trash. Otherwise, it all goes in the textile bin.

The fact is, when you donate textiles, you support local business and charities, help those in need, and reduce trash disposal costs. It's that simple. So don't be shy. Give your textiles another life.

The Town of Arlington hosts Community Collection Day in May and November every year. Gently used and re-saleable textiles are welcome at this event. But, don't wait for Community Collection Day to donate your tired, ugly and/or outdated textiles. These useful materials are collected at Goodwill Industries, The Salvation Army, Red Cross, St. Vincent de Paul, Got Books, Planet Aid, and Bay State Textiles every single day!

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<sup>i</sup>Massachusetts Waste Characterization Data Material Category Profiles.  
<http://www.mass.gov/dep/recycle/priorities/wcsmater.pdf>

<sup>ii</sup>Waste – Resource Conservation – Common Wastes and Materials.  
<http://www.epa.gov/osw/consERVE/materials/textiles.htm#facts>