

Dispelling popular myths; it's easy to recycle

There are myths associated with just about every topic known to man, from historical events to health concerns. Most of us are familiar with them and likely have even fallen for a few. Even recycling – one of the most important acts we can do to protect our environment—has its own set of myths.

In an effort to debunk the biggest recycling myths, R.I. Resource Recovery is shedding light on some of the most common misconceptions:

Myth #1 – Thieves can steal my identity from papers I recycle. While identity theft occurs, it is not as widespread as the media leads you to believe. By shredding important documents and credit card applications, you can safeguard your identity and still recycle. Simply, put the shredded paper in a paper shopping bag, staple the bag closed, and place the bag in your green bin. If you are overly concerned about concealing your name and address, rip the labels and magazine covers off and shred those too. Paper is a valuable commodity and needs to be recycled.

Myth #2 – A triangular recycling symbol means it is recyclable. This one is tricky, but it is false. Most plastic containers are stamped with the triangular “chasing arrows” symbol on the bottom. The number inside the triangle identifies what type of plastic the container is, but it's not a green light to recycle it. In Rhode Island, only plastic bottles and jugs with the numbers 1 and 2 can be recycled. Labels don't need to be peeled off, but remember to throw the cap in the trash - it's made from a different type of plastic resin that



Public Works Director Steve Goslee and Councilman Bill Kelly accepted a check for \$7,063 from officials of the Rhode Island Resource Recovery Corporation for the town's efforts on recycling. From the RIRRC are Michael O'Connell and Michael Mesolella.

can't be recycled.

Myth #3 – I have to take all the labels off my jars and cans. We are happy to shatter this myth! Many people cite this reason for not recycling, and it simply isn't the case. Recycling technology has advanced over the years, and doesn't require us to remove labels anymore. Metal lids can be recycled as well. Give the jars, cans, and lids a quick rinse (it doesn't have to be scrubbed clean) to reduce odors.

Myth #4 – Recycling takes too much time and effort. Quite the opposite in fact. It takes mere minutes a day to recycle. Look at this way: Keeping recyclable items out of your wastebaskets at home means fewer trips out to the garage or curb with the trash. For those communities where households

pay by the bag, recycling is a fast and easy way to lighten the load, literally, and reduce the number of trash bags. It is cost-effective and beneficial to the earth. We create the trash; we need to take responsibility for properly disposing of it as well.

Myth #5 – We already recycle as much as we can. Sorry, but no. Most R.I. municipal recycling rates are less than 15 percent. The current goal set by the state for each city and town is a diversion rate of 35 percent or higher, and the majority of cities and towns fall short of that goal. If every household recycled all eligible products, the recycling rates would be in the 40-50 percent range. For a list of the wide variety of recyclable items, or to download a brochure, visit www.rirrc.org.

Myth #6 – Paper items can be

put in the trash since they break down in a landfill. Unfortunately, they don't. Landfills are covered every day with 6-12 inches of soil that seals in the garbage and protects it from the elements needed for decomposition - sunlight, oxygen, and water. In fact, a newspaper put in the landfill a decade ago would still be readable today if it were uncovered.

Myth #7 – Most of my mail isn't recyclable because of the window envelopes or staples. This is one of the biggest misconceptions of all. All mail including magazines, catalogs, store circulars, window envelopes, greeting cards, and postcards can and should be put in the green bin for recycling. If you want to shred any paper that has your name on it, recycle the shreds.

Myth #8 – Recycling doesn't really make a difference. On the contrary. Recycling is important for the environment because it reduces the amount of waste for disposal, saves space in landfills, is more energy-efficient than burning materials, and conserves natural resources. Importantly, recycling is also good for the economy. It provides jobs for workers in the recycling business and those in the market of reprocessing and remanufacturing the products.

Myth #9 – I live in an apartment building and we mix our recyclables in with trash in our dumpster. Won't they be separated later?

Unfortunately, no. Recycled items have to be kept separate from trash so that they don't become contaminated. Once paper and other recyclables are commingled with trash, they are no longer recyclable. But you can change that. All you need are separate dumpsters or wheeled containers dedicated to recyclables. Contact your property manager to request a recycling dumpster.

Myth #10 – Rhode Island buries recyclables in the landfill. Very false. Recycling trucks deliver recyclables from your hometown to the Materials Recycling Facility where they are sorted, baled and sold. Recyclables, especially paper, fetch good money, bringing important revenue to the state.

Myth #11 – The Central Landfill is the highest point in Rhode Island. Not true. Jerimoth Hill in Foster is 812 feet. By comparison, the Central Landfill is 540 feet above sea level, with an actual height of 230 feet. Specifically, if you were to stand at the base of the landfill and measure its height, you will find that it is 230 feet tall. It is not the tallest “man-made structure” in Rhode Island either. A fair number of well-known buildings are all taller than 230 feet including The Bank of America Building, a.k.a. the “Superman” building; The Westin Hotel; Textron's headquarters at 40 Westminster St.; One Financial Plaza, formerly known as the Fleet Center; and URI's Chafee Hall in Kingston.

Recycling is an important and necessary part of our lives. By confronting these myths, and learning the truth about recycling in R.I, we can make sure we learn the right way to recycle to the max. Recycling as much of our waste as possible means that we are protecting, preserving, and keeping our communities healthy and beautiful, not just for our own benefit, but for many generations to follow.

Rhode Island Resource Recovery Corporation is the quasi-state environmental agency dedicated to providing the public with environmentally sound programs and facilities to manage waste. The agency helps fund and promote the state's recycling program, and owns and operates the Materials Recycling Facility and Central Landfill in Johnston.

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