

Project Guide

Textile Recycling

Waste Reduction & Recycling





Generation Earth Program

Generation Earth is a Los Angeles County Public Works environmental education program. Our goal is to educate and encourage youth in Los Angeles County to be an active part of the solution to environmental concerns in their community. We offer do-it-yourself environmental projects that help youth make a positive difference in their schools, at home and in the world. Our programs are built to support the needs of teachers, students and schools.

Waste in Los Angeles

Waste is a vital issue in Los Angeles County. Each person generates an average of five pounds of waste per day. This may not sound like much, but when multiplied over a period of a year, the amount of waste each person creates is staggering.¹ Waste is generally transported to one of ten solid waste landfills around Los Angeles County. It costs money to dispose of it and valuable open space is used to create landfills to store waste.

Reduce, Reuse, Recycle and Rethink

The four R's of waste reduction are reduce, reuse, recycle and rethink. The most impactful is to reduce the amount of materials used. The second is to reuse the material we already have. The third is recycle material back into the cycle of production and consumption. The last R is to rethink and make better choices by incorporating the first three R's into your daily lives. Often, items that are no longer needed by one person, may be still useful to someone else. Proper disposal of textile waste includes keeping it out of landfills through sharing, swapping, donating, recycling and repurposing.

Textile Recycling Project Guide

To help promote the reuse of items and reduce waste in the process, this guide provides the guidelines for students on how to run a textile recycling event. It includes a timeline, checklists, suggested management roles and more to ensure a successful event.

The Steps

1. Did You Know

The topic sheet provides useful information about consumerism. It can be used as an introduction to the topic to share with others and poses thoughtful questions for discussion.

2. Textile Recycling Event Preparation Checklist

Using the Textile Recycling Event Checklist students take steps needed to plan and run the event.

3. Textile Recycling Event Timeline

It takes one to two months to plan and produce a textile recycling event. Students follow the timeline to make the event happen.

4. Promotion Plan

Students create a promotion plan for reaching the largest audience possible. Guidelines are provided.

5. Evaluation

Complete the project by answering questions that serve to evaluate the process and offer next steps for potentially taking on an additional trash related project.

6. Resources

Resources are provided for curriculum and event/promotion partners.



DID YOU KNOW?

On average, an item of clothing lasts around five years before being thrown away.²

Where does this waste end up?

Prior to World War I, used clothing in a household was repaired, handed-down and repurposed for rags and quilts. Today, the U.S. generates 17 million tons of textile waste per year. That is 112 pounds of clothing waste per person, with 66 pounds of all unwanted clothes and textiles ending up in landfills.³

“Fast Fashion” is known in the fashion industry as moving clothing designs from the catwalk to the sales floor as quickly as possible to maximize profit.

How might this trend impact the waste and manufacturing industry?

New styles are no longer brought to the market on a seasonal basis. Instead they appear in stores multiple times a week. It's not uncommon for shoppers to wear an item once or twice before throwing it away for next week's style, aided by the poor quality of many of the clothes causing them to fall apart after several washes. This demand has forced retailers to lower the cost to produce garments, the quality of items produced and the wages for both the creation of fabrics and manufacturing of the items. Fast fashion also has a human cost: textile workers, primarily women in developing countries, are often paid derisory (inadequate) wages and forced to work long hours in appalling conditions.⁴

New textiles impact natural resources.

What are some of the resources impacted to create clothing and other textiles?

Cotton production accounts for 2.6% of annual global water usage.⁵ A single T-shirt made from conventional cotton requires 2,700 liters of water. That's enough drinking water for one person for 900 days.⁶ According to the World Health Organization, 20% of industrial water pollution comes from the textile manufacturing industry. Wastewater containing the chemicals and dyes used in manufacturing textiles end up in local water sources; in some manufacturing countries, local water sources are so polluted by chemicals that they can no longer sustain wildlife.⁷

Polyester is a synthetic fabric that's usually derived from petroleum. This fabric is one of the world's most popular textiles. Polyester production and use contribute to pollution around the world.⁸

Only 15% of clothing and other textiles are collected for repurposing or recycling in the US.⁹

What can be done to increase this and lessen the amount of waste going to the landfill?

Of the clothing and textiles collected, about 15% are sold in thrift stores. The remaining 80% are sold to be repurposed into low-quality textile materials for stuffing or rags and sent for disposal. Forty-five percent of this remaining amount is domestically and internationally reused and resold, 50% is used for low-grade textile needs, and 5% is landfilled or incinerated.⁹

All used shoes and clothing can be recycled. Donating textiles includes giving to local charity and thrift shops, community swaps, outdoor clothing recycling bins and direct donations to nonprofits that help children, domestic violence victims, people experiencing homelessness and more.

MAKE A PLAN & GET STARTED

A student-organized textile recycling event is an opportunity for students to promote reuse of items. There are steps to ensure a well-run event. Use the resources provided to get organized, set a date and complete the necessary tasks.

Preparation Checklist

- Have students use the Textile Recycling Checklist to plan and complete the first steps.
- Work as a team to assign tasks.

Timeline

- It takes one to two months to plan and produce a Textile Recycling event.
- Once a date is set, use the Textile Recycling Event Timeline on page 5 to complete the necessary tasks needed to ensure a successful event.

How a Textile Recycling Event Works

Textile waste consists of fabrics, clothing, bedding, linens, curtains, accessories, backpacks, shoes, rags and other items made of leather, polyester or fabric that have come to the end of their life because they are ripped, stained, don't fit or are no longer desirable. In a textile collection event:

- A school team arranges a collection time period and storage location with a textile recycling collection company or organization at least 30 days before the event.
- Make sure donations are in bags and placed in a storage area until the end of the collection event or until the minimum requirement for pickup has been met.
- At the end of the event, the organization picks up the donations for recycling.
- If enough donations are received, the organization often pays the school according to a predetermined pay-scale.

Helpful Hint

Review the Textile Recycling Event Checklist (page 4) and Textile Recycling Event Timeline (page 5) ahead of time to understand what will be required.

Textile Recycling Event Checklist

☐ Decide if You Are Raising Funds or Raising Awareness?

- Raising funds for school clubs or activities by means of a textile donation event can typically be achieved with a minimum donation of around 5,000 lbs. Shoes typically raise more funds than other textiles.
- Textiles can be donated in any quantity for different causes. Clothes in good condition, bedding, shoes and accessories can be donated to local nonprofits or shelters to be used by the people they assist.

☐ Identify a Textile Recycling Company or Nonprofit Partner

- Go to page 8 for a list of reliable textile recycling collection organizations.
- Confirm that the selected organization can pick up from your school or that a volunteer can deliver the donations.
- Ask if the textile recycling organization provides a crew to carry and handle all of the donations for loading their trucks.
- If fundraising, ask for the price breakdown of donations and payment. Typical pay rates vary by year, the organization you choose and the type of textiles collected. Some organizations require a minimum weight of textiles collected before payment is available.
- If donating to a charity, check what types of clothing or linens are accepted by the organization.
- Ask the organization if they assist in outreach efforts by providing banners and helping with press releases.

☐ Choose a Location

- Identify a large storage area that is protected from the weather.
- If you're inviting the public to drop off donations, identify the drop-off location and plan for taking donations to the storage area.

☐ Choose a Time Frame

- Collections can be for one day, one or more weeks or several months, depending on how quickly you can collect to reach the set goal.
- Any month during the school year will work.
- Consider the best time to advertise.

☐ Get Permission

- Choose a team to compile the information about the event and present to the Principal and other stakeholders.
- Ask for permission to use any school resources for advertising, such as newsletters or social media pages.

☐ Secure Materials

- Create posters, banners and flyers to promote the event.
- Make signs to direct people with donations to the drop-off area when they are nearby and on the campus.
- Find extra reusable bags to hold donations in case original bags tear.
- Consider finding a scale to weigh donations.

Textile Recycling Event Timeline

It takes one to two months to plan and produce a textile recycling event. Once the time frame is set, assign tasks and due dates.

One to Two Months Before the Event

- ☐ Identify and secure a location for the swap.
 - Evaluate the desired site and ensure it is suitable.
- ☐ Identify an organization to collect or accept donations.
- ☐ Present the event plan to key stakeholders to obtain permission.
- ☐ Create a promotion plan (see page 6).
 - Assign tasks to promotional team members.
- ☐ Create social media plan. Consider what websites or event pages to post.
- ☐ Create signs and secure banners.
- ☐ Create paper flyers for distribution.
- ☐ Write an advertisement or press release and get permission to send out.
- ☐ Launch promotion plan.
- ☐ Distribute and collect any necessary volunteer waivers.

One to Two Weeks Before the Event

- ☐ Coordinate ability to access the storage area.
- ☐ Secure all supplies and signage.
- ☐ Place instructional signage for donors at drop-off area.
- ☐ Continue promotion of event.

- ☐ Ensure all necessary volunteer forms are received.
- ☐ Reconfirm drop-off or pick-up details of donated textiles.

Collection Time

- ☐ Collect donations and place in storage area daily.
- ☐ Keep track of the quantity of donations received.
- ☐ Take photos and/or video.

After the Event

- ☐ Coordinate pick-up or drop-off of textiles with the organization.
- ☐ Remove all signs, banners and flyers after your event.
- ☐ Thank all organizations and stakeholders involved.
- ☐ If you were fundraising, within two to four weeks, the company should give you a report of the textiles collected in pounds and a check for items collected. Make sure to tell the company who the check should be addressed to so that you have access to the funds.
- ☐ Hold an informal event debriefing. Ask what went well and what you would change for next time. See page 7 for evaluation.
- ☐ Report the number of pounds of textiles collected to the school and selected community leaders. Share the results and photos with Generation Earth.
- ☐ Plan to celebrate your success with a party or fun activity!

PROMOTION PLAN

Create a promotion plan for reaching the largest audience possible. **The success of the event is tied to how much advertising and outreach is done.** Expect a 10% participation rate for all outreach efforts.

Consider:

Who do you want to reach in the community?

- Who is your audience?
- Will some materials need to be in another language?

What do you want to communicate?

- The reasons for the textile collection
- Date, time and location
- Free for all participants
- Details for involvement
- Items accepted
- Phone number or email for more information

Posters and Flyers

- Create posters and flyers that are appealing to your audience.
- Present information in a way that it is easily understandable.
- Include important information such as: who, what, when, where and why.
- Make sure the title and subheadings can be noticed from a distance and are eye-catching.
- Include appropriate graphics and photos.

How do you want to communicate?

- Create and send ads
 - School PTA newsletter
 - Local newspapers
 - Radio stations
 - Neighborhood/City Councils
 - Churches/Places of Worship
 - Organizations that help families in need
 - Partners with the school or event space
 - Community television channel to announce the event or to run a public service announcement
- Create and distribute flyers
 - Schools
 - Privately owned local businesses
 - Malls
 - Community Centers
 - Neighborhoods
- Social media
 - Online blogs
 - Facebook Event
 - Neighborhood websites
 - X posts
 - Instagram
- Word of Mouth
 - Door Knocking
 - Classroom Announcements
 - City Council Meeting

EVALUATION

Once the Textile recycling event is complete, have students answer the following questions to evaluate their project and introduce some possible next steps.

Questions

1. What was the most successful part of the project?
2. What was the least successful?
3. What would you do differently next time?

What's Next?

Are you interested in another project?
Consider using another Project Guide:

- Community Swap Event
- Composting
- Campus Curbside Recycling
- E-waste Collection Event
- Food Rescue



RESOURCES

Curriculum Ideas

- Invite a representative from Generation Earth or the textile company to speak to your group and/or faculty.
 - Make sure everyone knows what textile waste is and how to reduce, reuse and recycle it.
 - You can discuss what happens when textiles are disposed of in landfills and how they are recycled.

Organizations

- Textile Collection Event Fundraisers:
 - Clothes for the Cause: funds2orgs.com
 - USAgain: usagain.com/collection-drives
 - Soles4Souls: soles4souls.org/give-shoes
 - Angel Bins: angelbins.com
- Permanent Clothing Collection Bins:
 - USAgain: usagain.com/find-treemachine
- Charities:
 - Downtown Women's Center: downtownwomenscenter.org/donate-goods
 - Clothes the Deal: clothesthedeal.org/help-or-donate.html

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