

Recycling is one of our 3 Rs: Reduce, Reuse, Recycle

The truth is we all need to get into the habit of using less stuff in the first place. And the things we do use ought to be reused as much as possible before being recycled, to minimise waste.

Alongside reducing and reusing, recycling is essential for the future of our planet. Here are our top 9 reasons why...

1. Recycling conserves natural resources

The world's natural resources are finite, and some are in very short supply.

At a fundamental level:

- **Recycling paper and wood** saves trees and forests. Yes you can plant new trees, but you can't replace virgin rainforest or ancient woodlands once they're lost.
- **Recycling plastic** means creating less new plastic, which is definitely a good thing, especially as it's usually made from fossil fuel hydrocarbons.
- **Recycling metals** means there's less need for risky, expensive and damaging mining and extraction of new metal ores.
- **Recycling glass** reduces the need to use new raw materials like sand – it sounds hard to believe, but supplies of some types of sand are starting to get low around the world.

2. Recycling protects ecosystems and wildlife

Recycling reduces the need to grow, harvest or extract new raw materials from the Earth.

That in turn lessens the harmful disruption and damage being done to the natural world: fewer forests cut down, rivers diverted, wild animals harmed or displaced, and less pollution of water, soil and air.

Recycling also keeps waste out of the environment. As you'll know if you watched David Attenborough's Blue Planet II, a lot of plastic ends up in the oceans, where it causes all kinds of havoc.

3. Recycling protects people

As with point 2 above – the world's increasing demand for new stuff has led to more of the poorest and most vulnerable people (for example living around forests or river systems) being displaced from their homes, or otherwise exploited. Forest communities can find themselves evicted as a

result of the search for cheap timber. Rivers can be damned, or polluted by manufacturing waste, which harms local people.

Far better to recycle existing products than to damage someone else's community or land in the search for new raw materials.

And of course if our plastic waste isn't safely put in the recycling, it can be blown or washed into rivers and seas and end up hundreds or thousands of miles away, polluting coastlines and waterways, becoming a problem for everyone.

4. Recycling saves energy

Making products from recycled materials requires less energy than making them from new raw materials. Sometimes it's a huge difference in energy – for example:

- Producing new **aluminium** from old (including recycled cans and foil) uses 95% less energy than making it from scratch. For **steel** it's about a 70% energy saving.
- Making **paper** from pulped recycled paper uses 40% less energy than making it from virgin wood fibres.
- The amount of energy saved from recycling one **glass** bottle could power an old 100-watt light bulb for 4 hours – and a new low-energy LED equivalent for a lot longer.

5. Recycling cuts climate-changing carbon emissions

Because recycling means you need to use less energy on sourcing and processing new raw materials, it produces lower carbon emissions. It also keeps potentially methane-releasing waste out of landfill sites.

Reducing carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases being emitted into the atmosphere is vital for stopping disastrous climate change.

6. Recycling reduces landfill waste

Dumping our rubbish in landfill tips is hugely wasteful. Imagine all the potentially useful reusable stuff that's been buried over the decades. It's a waste of good waste.

Landfill also pollutes soil and water by leaching noxious and toxic liquids over time.



Landfill also releases greenhouse gases, like methane, into the atmosphere. And of course it takes up valuable land space.

7. Recycling reduces incineration

Incineration, burning our rubbish, is extremely wasteful of valuable resources that could be reused or recycled. The incineration process also generates carbon emissions, which contribute to climate change, as well as potential air pollution problems.

Sometimes incineration of waste is used to generate energy – but we don't believe this is a good solution to our waste or energy challenges.

8. Recycling is cheaper than waste collection and disposal

Lambeth council in London pointed out in 2017 that "it is 6 times cheaper to dispose of recycled waste than general refuse". So the more you recycle, and the less you put in the bin, the more money is saved, which should be good for households, businesses and local public services.

Recycling food waste and green waste is a great idea too, often generating lots of valuable compost that can be used to grow more food and other crops.

A new deposit return scheme being introduced for cans or bottles could offer an added financial incentive to recycle – because you'll lose your deposit if you don't.



Emerge Recycling, Manchester

Credit: www.johnbirdsall.co.uk

9. Recycling creates jobs

A report we published a few years ago calculated that at least 50,000 new UK jobs could be created by 2025 if we can reach the target of recycling 70% of our waste. It's ambitious but achievable. (As we've said it's around 45% now.)

Roughly 30,000 of the new jobs would be in recycling directly, with about another 20,000 in supply chains and the wider economy.