

Teacher Background Information

A World of Waste

What is solid waste? Also referred to as trash, rubbish, refuse, or garbage, solid waste means waste material that is not liquid or gas. These lessons focus on municipal solid waste (MSW), which includes household, commercial and institutional waste, but not wastes from mining, agriculture, silviculture, demolition debris, and a variety of sludges. The term “waste” has interesting connotations. It can refer to something leftover or something not used wisely. Much that is considered waste could actually be used wisely.

Solid waste is a serious issue in the United States. The U.S. leads the world in the production of municipal solid waste. Even compared to other wealthy industrialized nations such as Japan or countries in Europe, we generate twice as much solid waste per capita. The average American produces about 4.5 pounds of garbage each day! In 1960, that figure was 2.6 pounds. Every year in the United States, we generate 250 million tons of garbage. That’s enough trash to cover the state of Arizona 5 times!

Recycling has been growing steadily for over 30 years. From 1980 to 1990, the U.S. almost doubled its recycling rate from 9 percent to 17 percent. In 1995, our country’s average recycling rate was over 25 percent, and by 2010, it was approximately 34 percent. At Tucson’s Los Reales landfill, more than 1,500 tons of garbage arrive every day, much of it recyclable. Tucson’s recycling rate has increased from 9% to 23%.

A new state of the art Materials Recovery Facility (MRF) opened in July 2012, allowing us to recycle a

wider variety of material than ever before – especially plastics. Now we can handle all seven types of recyclable plastics.

Recycling is much more than an alternate means of waste disposal. Recycling is about conserving natural resources, reducing our use of energy and materials, minimizing pollution, and more.

What are the “Three Rs”?

In a waste reduction context, the “Three Rs” refer to reduce, reuse, and recycle. These are the three most basic, important ways to reduce waste, conserve natural resources, and decrease our impacts on the natural world. Reducing, reusing, and recycling often save money, too.

It is important to recognize that the order cited— reduce, reuse, recycle—is not arbitrary. Some people tend to think of recycling as a central focus and of reducing and reusing as less important, but this is not a correct understanding. Reducing is actually the most efficient way to conserve resources. Reusing is second in efficiency. Recycling is important, but is not as efficient as reducing and reusing. Recycling of course involves a cycle. For recycling to be successful, we need to complete the cycle, or “close the loop,” by buying recycled goods.

Although confusing, it’s important to learn to distinguish between the “made from recycled” symbol, which is a trio of light chasing arrows on a dark circle background, from the “recyclable” symbol, which is a simple trio of chasing arrows, with no dark background. A “made from recycled” product is actually made from materials that have been used before.



The success of the **Do More Blue** program depends on two factors:

- *Quality* of the recycled materials, and
- *Efficiency* of the collection.

It is the responsibility of each homeowner to follow these recommendations which allow for the best separation and eventual use of the recycled materials.

Unacceptable Materials:

- Plastic bags
- Grass
- Yard waste
- Styrofoam
- Food waste
- Diapers
- Clothing
- Aluminum foil
- Hazardous waste

Guidelines for Blue Barrel Recycling

- Please make sure materials are clean, empty and dry.
- Set out your Blue Barrel for collection when it is more than half full to decrease fuel consumption and air pollution.
- Have barrel at curb by 6 a.m. to ensure service.
- Leave labels on containers.
- Bottle and jar caps and lids can be recycled.
- Lightly rinse food containers. Use water wisely - throw very dirty items into the garbage.
- All recyclables go loose into the Blue Barrel, together - no sorting! Please put them in individually, not inside a box or bag.
- Do not flatten cans and bottles to ensure sorting equipment works properly.
- Cut or flatten corrugated cardboard boxes to fit in container. Remove plastic wrapping and liners.
- Shredded paper may be recycled in the Blue Barrel if it is secured in a clear plastic bag.

(NOTE: This is the only time that plastic bags can go in the recycling container.)

