

Creating Wealth from Everyday Items



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Washington, DC

Institute for Local Self-Reliance

The Institute for Local Self-Reliance (ILSR) is a nonprofit research and educational organization that provides technical assistance and information to city and state government, citizen organizations, and industry.

Since 1974, ILSR has researched the technical feasibility and commercial viability of environmentally sound, state-of-the-art technologies with a view to strengthening local economies. ILSR works to involve citizens, government, and private enterprise in the development of a comprehensive materials policy oriented towards efficiency, recycling, and maximum utilization of renewable energy sources.

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Introduction

Reuse, in various forms, has been practiced by a number of organizations for decades. Reuse has routinely occurred through shops that perform a maintenance, repair, rental, or remanufacturing function, or that resell surplus or used goods. Less formally, garage sales, flea markets, and auctions also redistribute used items. Many of these operations are small and locally owned, while others are large and maintain a national presence (e.g., Goodwill Industries and the Salvation Army). Despite this well developed infrastructure, most of the reusable goods in the waste stream are not recovered. In 1994, 85% of the 29.9 million tons of durable goods in the municipal solid waste stream ended up in landfills or incinerators— toys, bicycles, mattresses, couches, suitcases, appliances, computers. The list is endless. These discards contain tremendous untapped wealth. As communities strive to contain solid waste handling costs, meet waste reduction goals, and link recycling with local economic development, a new generation of reuse operations and strategies has emerged. Nonprofit organizations, for-profit retail operations, and local government initiatives have sprouted to turn one person's trash into another person's gold.

This booklet profiles 13 model reuse operations and collection programs. Most of these target the household waste stream. They represent only a sample of the numerous reuse efforts now taking place in the United States. (See ILSR's report *Reuse Operations: Community Development Through Redistribution of Used Goods*, for a list of 67 reuse and material exchange operations.)

All 13 programs profiled are unique. There is no one model. Communities looking at starting a reuse collection program or enterprise should explore options that best suit their local situation, recycling/reuse infrastructure, needs, and desired customer base.

The list of items these reuse programs recover is impressive. The ReStore accepts corks, candle stubs, thread spools, buttons, and other delectable trinkets. St. Paul picks up at curbside a wide range of reusable household items and textiles including rags as small as 5" by 5". Montgomery County, Maryland, operates a reusable building material and mattress drop-off site, offers weekly pickup of clothing and other textiles from local charities, and supports a household furniture pickup service. Urban Ore probably accepts the widest range of discards, anything from magazines and records to lawn mowers and bath tubs. Indeed, most everyday household items can be reused.

By providing information on working models and tips for replication, we hope this booklet helps expand the reuse infrastructure throughout the country. It is oriented toward the lay person, recycling and solid waste professionals, economic development officials, and community-based organizations. The operations documented are all replicable. Many are interested in starting similar enterprises in other cities or are available to assist others in doing so. If the 25.5 million tons of durable goods now discarded were reclaimed through the types of reuse operations profiled here, more than 220,00 new jobs could be created in this industry alone.

This report is one in a series of four booklets, funded by the U.S. EPA, on product reuse as an important economic development and waste reduction strategy.

The other three are:

- *Sustaining Businesses & Jobs through Pallet Reuse & Repair*
- *Plug into Electronics Reuse*
- *Weaving Textile Reuse into Waste Reduction*

Additional ILSR booklets on reuse include *Reuse Operations: Community Development Through Redistribution of Used Goods* (1995) and *Community Development Corporations and Reuse Operations: Four Case Studies of Working Relationships* (1996).

For more information on these booklets, contact the Institute for Local Self-Reliance, Washington, D.C., 202-232-4108.

Durable Goods

- Durables goods generally are defined as products having a lifetime of three years or more. They include large and small appliances, furniture and furnishings, carpets and rugs, consumer electronics, sporting equipment, luggage, toys, hardware, building materials, kitchen utensils, and the like.
- In 1994, an estimated 29.9 million tons of durable goods were generated in the United States

municipal solid waste stream (excluding building and construction materials, shipping/transport items, and automobiles).

- Of this 29.9 million tons, which represents 14.3% by weight of total municipal solid waste generated, only 4.4 million tons were recovered. The remaining 25.5 million were landfilled or incinerated.

Source: *Characterization of Municipal Solid Waste in The United States: 1995 Update*, U.S. EPA, EPA530-R-96-001, March 1996.

Table 1: Model Reuse Operations and Collection Programs

| Community/ Operation | Location | Operation Type | Customer | TPY | % Reused (b) | Start Date |
|------------------------------|----------------|---|---------------------------|-------|--------------|------------|
| Calaveras Co./Salv. Army | CA | Salvation Army trailer at landfill | Salvation Army | 48 | 90% | 1992 |
| Chatham Co. Swap Shops | NC | Co.-run Swap Shops at drop-off sites | Public | NA | 90% | 1993 |
| City of LA/Salvation Army | CA | Pilot curbside of textiles and HH items | Salvation Army | 40 | NA | 1995 |
| Intern'l Furniture & Bedding | Baltimore, MD | Mattress remanufacturing plant | Mattress retailers | 800 | 90% | 1984 |
| L.A. Shares | LA, CA | Nonprofit reuse operation | Nonprofits and schools | 270 | 99% | 1993 |
| Materials for the Arts | New York, NY | Govt.-run reuse operation | Arts/cultural community | 428 | 95% | 1979 |
| Montgomery County | MD | Co.-run drop-off, and furniture pickup | Varies (b) | 368 | 100% | 1990 |
| Recycletown | Rio Nido, CA | Nonprofit drop-off and retail reuse operation | Public | 273 | 11% | 1992 |
| ReStore | Montpelier, VT | Nonprofit retail reuse store | Public | 35 | 97% | 1990 |
| St. Paul/Goodwill | MN | Curbside collection of textiles and HH items | Goodwill Industries | 168 | 92% | 1992 |
| Surplus Exchange | Kansas, MO | Nonprofit reuse and repair operation | Nonprofits | 1,030 | 70% | 1984 |
| Urban Ore, Inc. | Berkeley, CA | For-profit reuse/recycling retail operation | Public | 3,500 | 73% | 1980 |
| Wooden Artifacts Cons. | Stone Co., AR | Nonprofit furniture repair workshop | Families/individ. in need | 5 | 100% | 1989 |

Source: Institute for Local Self-Reliance, 1996

HH = Household TPY = Tons Per Year

(a) Percent of incoming materials that are actually reused or repaired; i.e., as-is or refurbished for item's original intended purpose. Does not include remainder that is recycled, i.e. reclaimed for salvage value.

(b) Textile recycler for textiles, The Loading Dock for building materials, Salvation Army and Beds Are Us for mattresses, and the Housing Opportunities Commission for furniture.



Magazines on sale at Urban Ore's Arts and Media Exchange.



Toy rocking horse on sale at Urban Ore's General Store.

Reuse Development Organization (ReDO)

A new membership organization for reuse operators recently formed to promote reuse as an environmentally sound, socially beneficial and economical means of handling unwanted and discarded materials. Called the Reuse Development Organization, or ReDO, the association will provide the following services to its members:

- Information exchange and a place to find reuse information, especially profiles of other reuse businesses and programs, funding sources, other resources, results of research and development efforts, donors of materials
- Goods exchange and brokerage through a central network
- Local or regional meetings
- Trade organization to represent members
- Consulting or consulting referrals

For more information, contact either Mary Lou Van Deventer, Urban Ore, Inc., 6082 Ralston Avenue, Richmond, CA 94805, or Dee Dee Diccicco-Craft, Environmentally Yours, P.O. Box 619, West Sand Lake, NY 12196.