Responses to 10 Common Anti-Recycling Arguments

1. Recycling costs too much.
· Well-run recycling programs cost less than landfills and incinerators.
· The more people recycle, the cheaper it gets.
· Recycling helps families save money, especially in communities with pay-as-you-throw programs.
· Recycling generates revenue to help pay for itself, while incineration and landfilling do not.

2. Recycling should pay for itself.
· Landfills and incinerators don't pay for themselves; in fact they cost more than recycling programs.
· Recycling creates more than one million U.S. jobs in recycled product manufacturing alone.1
· Hundreds of companies, including Hewlett Packard, Bank of America, and the U.S. Postal Service, have saved millions of dollars through their recycling programs.
· Through recycling, the U.S. is saving enough energy to provide electricity for 9 million homes per year.2

3. Recycling causes pollution.
· Recycling results in a net reduction in ten major categories of air pollutants and eight major categories of water pollutants.3
· Manufacturing with recycled materials, with very few exceptions, saves energy and water and produces less air and water pollution than manufacturing with virgin materials.
· Recycling trucks often generate less pollution than garbage trucks because they do not idle as long at the curb. If you add recycling trucks, you should be able to subtract garbage trucks.4
· By 2005, recycling will reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 48 million tons, the equivalent of the amount emitted by 36 million cars.1

4. Recycling doesn't save trees or other natural resources.
· 94% of the natural resources America uses are non-renewable (up from 59% in 1900 and 88% in 1945). Recycling saves these non-renewable resources.1
· With recycling, 20% more wood will need to be harvested by 2010 to keep up with demand. Without recycling, 80% more wood would need to be harvested.4
· 95% of our nation's virgin forests have been cut down and less than 20% of paper manufactured in the U.S. comes from tree farms.4
· It takes 95% less energy to recycle aluminum than it does to make it from raw materials.5 Making recycled steel saves 60%, recycled newspaper 40%, recycled plastics 70%, and recycled glass 40%. Landfilling never saves energy.4
· Recycling saves 3.6 times the amount of energy generated by incineration and 11 times the amount generated by methane recovery at a landfill.2
· Using scrap steel instead of virgin ore to make new steel takes 40% less water and creates 97% less mining waste.3

· Tree farms and reclaimed mines are not ecologically equivalent to natural forests and ecosystems. Recycling prevents habitat destruction, loss of biodiversity, and soil erosion associated with logging and mining.

5. There is no landfill crisis.
· Recycling's true value comes from preventing pollution and saving natural resources and energy, not landfill space.
· Recycling is largely responsible for averting the landfill crisis.
· Most states have less than twenty years of landfill capacity —who wants to live next to a new landfill?6
· The number of landfills is decreasing, while the cost to send waste to them is on the rise.6

6. Landfills and incinerators are safe.
· Landfills and incinerators can be major sources of pollution. For example, leachate from solid waste landfills is similar in composition to that of hazardous waste landfills.2
· About 1/4 of the sites on the Superfund list (the nation's most hazardous sites) are solid waste landfills.3
· Landfills are responsible for 36% of all methane emissions in the U.S., one of the most potent causes of global warming.2
· About 2/3 of operating landfills do not have liners to protect groundwater and drinking water sources.4
· Landfill owners only have to check for groundwater contamination for 30 years. What happens afterwards?

7. If recycling makes sense, the free market will make it happen.

· Government supports lots of services that the free market wouldn't provide, such as the delivery of running water, electricity, and mail to our homes.

· Unlike most public services, recycling does function within the market economy, and quite successfully.

· If the market were truly free, long-standing subsidies that favor virgin materials and landfills would not exist, and recycling could compete on a level playing field.

8. There are no markets for recyclables.

· Prices may fluctuate as they do for any commodity, but domestic and international markets exist for all materials collected in curbside recycling programs.

· Demand for recycled materials has never been greater. American manufacturers rely on recyclables to produce many of the products on your store shelves.

· By the year 2005, the value of materials collected for recycling will surpass $5 billion per year.[1]

· All new steel products contain recycled steel.[7]

· Over 1,400 products and 310 manufacturers use post-consumer plastics.[8]

· In 1999, recycled paper provided more than 37% of the raw material fiber needed by U.S. paper mills.[9]

9. We are already recycling as much as we can.

· The national recycling rate is 28%. U.S. EPA has set a goal of 35% and many communities are recycling 50% or more.[3]

· Many easily recycled materials are still thrown away. For example, 73% of glass containers, 77% of magazines, 66% of plastic soda and milk bottles, and 45% of newspapers are not recycled.[3]

· We are nowhere near our potential, especially if manufacturers make products easier to recycle.

10. Recycling is a burden on families.

· Recycling is so popular because the American public wants to do it.

· More people recycle than vote.10

· More than 20,000 curbside programs and drop-off centers for recycling are active today because Americans use and support them.3

Statistical sources: (1) Office of the Federal Environmental Executive, (2) Environmental Defense, (3) U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, (4) Natural Resources Defense Council, (5) Aluminum Association, (6) *Biocycle* Magazine, (7) Steel Recycling Institute, (8) American Plastics Council, (9) American Forest & Paper Association, (10) *Resource Recycling* Magazine.

For more detailed rebuttals and sources of additional statistics, see the Defending Recycling links page.

For More information:

National Recycling Coalition

1727 King St.

Suite 105

Alexandria, VA 22314

Phone: 703-683-9025

Fax: 703-683-9026

http://www.nrc-recycle.org/

University of Colorado Recycling Services

University Memorial Center 331

Campus BOX 207

Boulder, CO 80309

303.492.8307

303.492.1897 (fax)

cure@stripe.colorado.edu

www.colorado.edu/cure