

ReUSE Centre



The three "R's" of the Environmental movement are **Reduce, Recycle and Reuse**. For years, we've been hearing about ways we can reduce the amount of energy and consumer products we are using. We've also learned about the importance of recycling metal, glass, paper products and plastic. But finding ways to **reuse** products has been somewhat overlooked. One site that is helping to turn that around is Edmonton's Reuse Centre. The Centre is located at 10004 - 103 A Ave, right across the street from city hall.

Enviro Kids Guide spoke with Amy Baxter, the Reuse Coordinator for the Centre. She points

out that "the wonderful thing about reusing products is the fact that it saves all the energy and resources that would have gone into creating new products.



The centre is a very community-based initiative that sees valuable material utilized by your friends and neighbours." Recycling is, of course, a wonderful option, but there is a very big "loop" associated with the process. It takes a lot of energy and industry to turn an aluminum pie shell into an aluminum can. It's much easier to simply reuse the aluminum pie shell.

The idea behind the Reuse Centre sprang from community-based

Reuse Fairs that have been going on in Edmonton for over fifteen years. The old saying "one man's trash is another man's treasure" definitely rang true at these events as community members gathered to exchange material they had accumulated over the years. Amy tells us that "many of the volunteers who were active with the Reuse Fairs now come in and help out at the Reuse Centre on a regular basis."

The Reuse Centre does not accept furniture, clothing or appliances as there are already many charities in Edmonton that will accept that material. The following list shows the kind of material that they can accept:



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|---|---------------------------|---------------------------------|
| *Art & craft supplies | *Feathers | *Onion bags |
| *Aluminum pie & tart shells | *Film canisters | *Packing boxes |
| *Awards (medals, ribbon & trophies) | *Floppy disks | *Paint swatches |
| *Baby food jars | *Frozen juice lids | *Plastic containers (with lids) |
| *Baskets (wicker & plastic berry) | *Games & puzzles | *Postage stamps |
| *Bingo dabbers | *Gift wrapping | *Pull tabs |
| *Blankets | *Greeting cards | *Records |
| *Books & magazines | *Grocery bags | *Sea shells |
| *Calendars with pictures | *Hockey sticks (broken) | *Seasonal and party decorations |
| *Cardboard tubes (paper towel and wrapping paper) | *Ink jet cartridges | *Shoe boxes |
| *CD's and CD cases | *Jewellery and watches | *Slides |
| *Cell phones | *Jewellery boxes | *Storage bins |
| *Clothespins | *Keys | *Telephone wire |
| *Corks | *Labels | *Tennis balls |
| *Countertop and flooring samples | *Laundry soap scoops | *Tiles |
| *Dowels | *Magnets | *Tins |
| *Egg cartons | *Maps | *Upholstery samples |
| *Eyeglasses & cases | *Milk jug lids | *Wallpaper |
| *Fabric | *Needle craft supplies | |
| | *Office & school supplies | |

For a small fee, anyone can pick up material for their latest project. The costs are:

Individuals: \$2.00 for one time pick up
\$20.00 for unlimited pickups for one year

Organizations: \$4.00 for one time pick up
\$40.00 for unlimited pick ups for one year

Most of the people patronizing the Centre have been private individuals or families looking to work on their home projects. Actors putting on Fringe Theatre production have stopped by to pick up material they can use in their stage designs. "We even had staff from a movie set come out and pick up material they needed for a film they were shooting," says Amy. "That's a pretty exciting way to see material reused."

Some of the material that comes into the Centre goes to inner-city missions that help the homeless. "We collect a lot of 750 ml plastic containers that are used for things like yogurt and cottage cheese, and we pass them on to House Of Refuge Mission where they use them to hand out soup. Any bags or knapsacks we get are usually passed along to homeless shelters as well," says Amy.

Unique Artwork

Different artists have held workshops at the Reuse Centre, demonstrating ways they can create arts and crafts projects out of everyday objects. The only limitation is the artist's imagination.

One artist taught participants how to "crochet" extremely solid and reusable shopping bags by using hundreds of the flimsy shopping bags that are handed out at grocery stores. A craft enthusiast used foam cushions to create beds for cats and dogs staying at the Humane Shelter. Broken hockey sticks have been used to create a hockey stick coat rack. Another interesting project was the creation of cork-boards using wine corks that would normally be discarded. "There is also a real satisfaction that comes from using materials that might otherwise be thrown out," says Amy. "Our goal is to get people thinking about how to reuse products they didn't realize were still useful."



Clearing Out the Clutter

Homeowners often want to get rid of the clutter in their houses, but at the same time they don't want to throw out trophies or crafts that have come to have a special significance to them. Amy notes that "it's a lot easier to let stuff go when you realize it is being put to good use."

A lot of us hold on to stuff because we think we will be able to do **something** with it **someday**. "I used to hoard a lot of material myself," admits Amy. "I do a lot of crafts projects with my kids, so I would hold on to stuff for years thinking that I might have some use for it. Now that the Reuse Centre is in operation, I'm a lot more willing to let stuff go because I know where I can get the material if I need it."



Saving Landfill Space

In July and August of 2007, 13 tonnes of material was accepted by the Reuse Centre. Less than one tonne had to be sent to landfill sites as it couldn't be used, while 8 tonnes were picked up by people for their own uses. "We weigh everything as it comes in and goes out as a way of analyzing the success of our program," says Amy. "We are currently taking in a little more material than we are sending out, but we expect that to turn around once people are more familiar with the service we have to offer."

One of the great things about the Reuse Centre is the fact that they can use stuff that might not otherwise be recyclable. Binders offer an excellent example - they are typically made of plastic, paper and steel. Each of these items is recyclable individually - but the binders can't practically be recycled given the amount of work necessary in breaking each one down into its constituent parts. "Hundreds of binders have gone through the Reuse Centre," says Amy. "Some students use them for school, while other people convert them into photo albums. This saves the city the expense of having to bury them in a landfill, so it's definitely a win-win scenario all around."