

## Activity 4: Reducing Solid Waste

**Objective:** Determine appropriate environmentally friendly methods of disposal that help to reduce the amount of solid waste sent to landfills.

**Materials:**

sets of pictures of “trash” items to be sorted

sheets of paper, envelopes, or labeled containers for sorting of trash items into categories

**Background:**

Americans make up about 6% of the world’s population, but many experts estimate that we use as much as 30% of the total energy and resources consumed annually by the world’s population. Our way of life is comfortable because of our numerous conveniences: central heating and air conditioning, hot and cold running water, refrigerators, televisions, automobiles, etc. Unfortunately, our lifestyle consumes so much energy and resources and produces so much waste that we are contributing to the depletion, or using up, of many non-renewable resources.

Every trash item that we throw away eventually ends up at a waste disposal facility. Some trash is burned to reduce its volume but the majority of solid waste in the United States ends up buried in a landfill or “dump”. Every trash item that is sent to a landfill removes natural resources from availability for use by people in the future. The good news is that people can drastically reduce the amount of solid waste we send to landfills. We can **reduce** the amount of waste we produce by buying fewer unnecessary products and products that have lots of disposable packaging materials. Of course, we will always end up producing some trash. There are several techniques that we can use to help us conserve resources and reduce the amount of solid waste we send to landfills:

**Reuse** – using an item again for the same or a different purpose

(ex: using a glass pickle jar as a container for change or an old tire as a tree swing)

**Donate** – give the item to charity or to a friend or relative who can use it

(ex: giving a small TV you don’t want any more to the Salvation Army)

**Recycle** – send the item to a recycling center or place the item in a neighborhood recycling bin

**Compost** -- placing biodegradable items in a pile or container that lets them decompose and turn back into soil; the compost can be used to provide nutrition for other plants in your yard (ex: composting apple cores, potato peels, coffee grounds, even small paper scraps)

**Burn** – although burning doesn’t allow us to directly re-use resources, it DOES reduce the volume of trash that we sent to landfills; it is not the best option for conserving resources but it is sometimes useful or necessary

**Landfill** –sometimes there is no way to save the resources in a product and it MUST be landfilled

**Directions:**

1. Ask participants why throwing large quantities of trash away in landfills is an unwise method for managing natural resources. Discuss ideas and ask for suggestions of methods that can be used to reduce solid waste.
2. You might want to read the background information (above) aloud prior to beginning the activity below.
3. Have participants form groups of four and give each group a set of pictures of trash items to sort and a set of papers or containers labeled (re-use, donate, recycle, compost, burn, landfill, other).
4. Allow participants to sort the pictures of trash items into categories that would be the “best” or most environmentally friendly method of waste disposal. The key in this step is to get people talking and debating different possible fates for each item – there may not be one “correct” category for each item. For example, a glass bottle could be reused or recycled. You may want to allow people to put certain items aside if they can’t determine a single best fate for them.
5. Lead all groups in a discussion of how they classified each item. If people disagree about how certain items can be dealt with, encourage them to complete the extension activity.
6. **Extension Activity:** Research different methods of disposal for trash items, particularly those that are not easily composted or recycled. Share the information that you find out with other people in your area or in your local club.

**Reuse**

**Recycle**

**Donate**

**Compost**

# **Burn**

# **Landfill**

# **Other**

styrofoam cup



batteries



cardboard box



flea collar



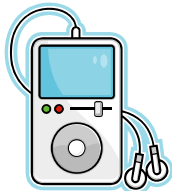
envelopes with plastic windows



used motor oil



iPod with broken headphones



milk jug



grass and leaves



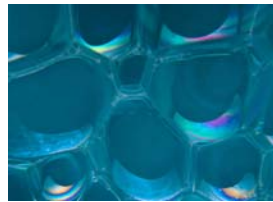
rubber band



plastic butter bowl



plastic bubble wrap



old window air conditioner



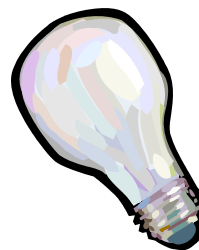
old athletic shoes



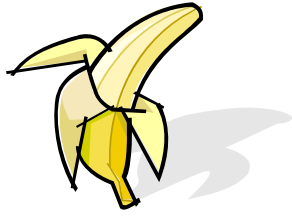
old tire (flat)



light bulb



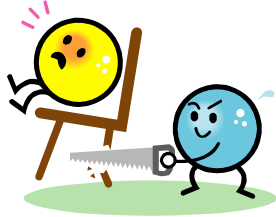
banana peels



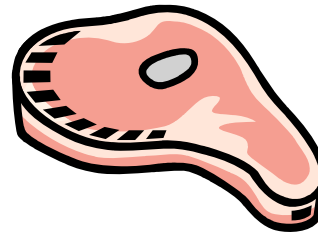
plastic forks



wooden chair,  
missing a leg



spoiled meat



glass soda bottle



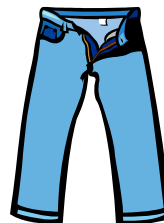
shoe box



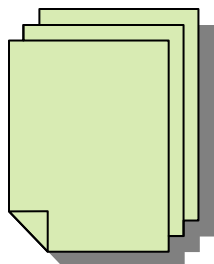
soda can



old clothes



junk mail (white paper)



used cat litter



plastic grocery bags

CD case

