



Green Sense 10/27/13

### **Donate, Recycle, Don't Throw Away**

Have you seen the new white clothing and textile recycle boxes at the schools around town? This is a new program that will recycle your old clothes and textiles and provide a rebate to our schools.

For this program, Reading's Schools have partnered with Bay State Textiles, a member of SMART (the Secondary Materials and Recycled Textiles Association). Donating your used textiles is truly a way you can be SMART.

Bring any clothing, fabrics (including towels, sheets, tablecloths), handbags, shoes, stuffed animals, or other textiles to the bins and donate to this effort as long as the items are clean and dry. Stained, torn or ragged - Don't Throw It Away - recycle it! The materials will be sorted, graded and selected for the appropriate market applications to be re-used.

Good clothing will be sent along to partners who provide used clothing such as Goodwill and Salvation Army. Textiles can be recycled into blankets, wiping rags, or fiber to create new clothing or stuffing.

With 3.5 Billion pounds of useable textiles thrown away each year (10 pounds per American), there is a lot of waste that can be prevented. Contrary to popular belief, donations in any condition are welcomed by for-profit and non-profit textile collectors alike.

You can even donate items with stains, rips, missing buttons or broken zippers. Why? Textiles are a valuable commodity! Items that don't sell in a thrift store are baled and sold to brokers or graders who sell to other markets. This income helps Goodwill and other thrift stores to support their mission.

The ONLY unacceptable donations are wet/moldy items, and items contaminated with oil or hazardous substances.

Donate:

- Clothing: Shirts, pants, jackets, suits, hats, belts, ties, gloves, scarves, socks (even single ones), undergarments, handbags, backpacks - in any style, age or condition
- Footwear: Shoes, sandals, sneakers, cleats, boots, flip-flops, and slippers
- Household textiles (even stained and torn items): Curtains, drapes, sheets, blankets, comforters, towels, table linens, throw rugs, pillows, stuffed dolls and stuffed animals

According to Baystate Textiles' website ([www.baystatetextiles.com](http://www.baystatetextiles.com)), about 45% of donated textiles are sold as second hand apparel, either through charitable organizations or for-profit exporters that sell baled clothing to developing countries. Non-clothing fabric is sorted, creating local jobs.

Local companies turn about 30% of the donated textiles into industrial wiping cloths. ERC Wiping Products (Lynn, MA) cuts used clothing and other textiles into rags and sells them to commercial garages and public works operations. The remaining 20% is sent to fiber converters like Millbury Textile Recycling (Millbury, MA) where textiles are broken down into their basic fiber components to be re-manufactured into insulation for autos and homes, carpet padding, or sound-proofing materials.

Companies like Boston-based Project Repat make custom quilts and blankets out of old t-shirts. These "upcycled" products are sewn at factories in Woburn, Lawrence and New Bedford that pay workers a fair and living wage.

Reusing textiles uses less energy and less water than any competitive products made from newly produced paper or textiles according to SMART. You may even have used wipes made from recycled fabric in your home or for your car, soft lint-free wipes or super absorbent rags.

Collection bins are located outside of all 9 of the Reading public schools. Placing the boxes at the schools makes for convenience for the community.

By recycling the items, Reading can save on the cost of trash disposal, generate revenue for the schools and have a positive impact on the environment. Bay State Textiles pays a rebate to the schools of \$100 per ton for the unwanted textiles.

There is no cost to the program and Bay State Textiles maintains the bins, servicing the boxes at least once a week. A driver goes around with a hamper and scale, a report is generated that goes to the schools and rebate checks are received monthly.

When cleaning out your closets, be SMART, donate your textiles and support our schools!

A column by members of Reading's Climate Committee Gina Snyder with information from Mary DeLai, Assistant Superintendent, Reading Public Schools