

Green is the new Gold Standard



Image by Michael Flippo/Dreamstime.com

The impact of a textile-recycling program epitomizes perhaps one of the most important ideas behind conservation: Every individual and each individual action, no matter how small, can add up to meaningful change.

By **SAM EBENEZER**, Green City Recycler

Textiles, such as clothing, shoes and other home accessories, account for nearly 5 percent of all landfill space in the U.S. Each year, the average apartment resident discards approximately 35 pounds of these materials.* Consider the impact apartment communities could have in the Houston metro area alone. Annually, with roughly 580,000 units and two residents per unit, more than 40 million pounds of textiles are being thrown away rather than reused.

Why Recycle?

A common misconception is that textiles can only be donated and resold; meaning heavily used or worn items are better candidates for the trash. "No one would want this," a person might say, but as raw materials, those burned oven mitts and torn sneakers become useful again in any number of ways. Pieces of denim serve as insulation behind drywall. Wool and nylon are used in carpet padding. Old textiles can be upcycled into new materials or turned into absorbent wiping rags for industrial uses. Small household appliances like toasters and hair dryers, while not considered textiles, are accepted for recycling as well; if a device doesn't work, its parts can be salvaged and repurposed.

Globalization has created a market of fast fashion – clothing and other goods that are sold at such inexpensive rates they're considered disposable by consumers, but the costs are high for the environment. The production of textiles from new materials is a notoriously energy-hungry and polluting process. Large quantities of water and pesticides are used in growing cotton, for example, and the manufacturing of polyester employs considerable amounts of crude oil and releases harmful emissions and wastewater by-products. Global manufacturing also raises human rights concerns such as the treatment of workers, low wages and child labor.

One way to reduce this harmful footprint is to ensure that textile materials truly reach the end of their life cycle before they're discarded. Education about the importance of textile recycling, as well as easy access to a means of textile recycling, can make a world of difference. There's no better place to begin this effort than in a multifamily community where residents could have access to a shared recycling pod to efficiently and conveniently extend the life of secondhand goods at no cost to them or to the apartment owner, since

Rebate Earning Potential

Let's say your property has 260 units and your recycling company partner charges \$.35 per pound:

Annual volume that can be recycled per unit: 70 pounds

Total: 18,200 pounds/year

Rebate to apartment community: \$.035/pound

Annual projected revenue: \$637.00



the expenses of servicing the recycling pod are recouped from the resale of the items and raw materials.

Green as an Amenity

Residents consider eco-friendly amenities a big plus when deciding where to rent, and sometimes they view it as a given. During a tour, in addition to pointing out a recycling pod's presence, apartment communities can share concrete data on how the pods are performing.

Make sure to hire a recycling company that will record the volume collected each month from individual pods and send this information to your apartment managers, who will often highlight community participation via social media, newsletters and community websites. Recycling goals can be set for a community, with progress tracked month by month. Holly Creek Apartments in The Woodlands, with 348 units, recycled 3,865 pounds of textiles in just three months, which became a great piece of data to share with prospective residents.

A recycling pod is a useful resource for residents during move-in or move-out cleanings, as well as for those who have limited mobility or no access to a car. And sometimes having a recycling pod at your doorstep just makes life easier. A resident from Riverwood Apartments in Conroe called us to express her appreciation for the property's recycling pod, saying she was able to recycle six bags of used clothing that had been taking up space for many months because she'd never found the time to drive them to a donation center.

Your recycling pod should be placed in an area best suited for your residents and their needs, whether in the community's dedicated trash and/or recycling center, near the laundry facility or another public space. Service of the pod can be scheduled as often as twice a week or once every 15 days, based on the community's typical output, and no contract is required.

Unlike traditional dumpsters, the design of recycling pods is aesthetically pleasing, and pods are typically refurbished every two years, or as needed, to ensure that they meet the standards of your apartment community. There are pods that come with a QR code

that can connect the pod to your apartment manager's smartphone, alerting them anytime the pod needs immediate attention.

High-rise and mid-rise apartments that don't have space for a dedicated pod always have the option of valet pickup, in which residents simply leave their textile waste outside their door, marking bags with special decals that denote the contents are textile recycling.

Give Back and Get Back

Residents like to see that their recycled items continue to positively influence the environment and the community. On the recycling pods, recycling companies will typically list the charities to where monetary donations are donated.

If you decide to partner with a recycling company, ask if they have a rebate program. A rebate program allows your apartment property to make money off of its participation – the greater the participation, the more a property will make. Depending on your recycling partner's rates, an apartment property with a high unit count might expect to make around \$500 to \$600 annually. ♻️

**Adjusted figure for multifamily community resident is based on EPA estimate for residential homeowners.*

Sam Ebenezer has been helping communities recycle textiles since 2007. He is the CEO for Green City Recycler, a textile recycling company for multifamily homes and residential homes headquartered in Houston. Green City Recycler is currently the only textile-recycling company in Houston that primarily services the multifamily industry. Partnering with Green City Recycle means you're also partnering with the Austin based organization End Trafficking Now and the American Cancer Federation. Visit www.greencityrecycler.com for more information. Sam can be reached at 240 481 9532 or via info@greencityrecycler.com. Meet Sam and the Green City Recycler team at the HAA Education Conference and Expo on May 18 at NRG Center.