



# FACT SHEET

## Textile Recovery Initiative

### Textile Waste

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- The EPA's report on municipal solid waste<sup>1</sup> states 6% of all of materials going into landfills or incinerators are clothing or textile products.
- According to waste composition analyses<sup>2</sup>, approximately 230,000 tons of usable clothing, footwear, linens and other textile products are thrown away in Massachusetts annually.
- Approximately 95% of all used clothing, footwear and other household textile products such as sheets, towels, curtains, pillows and stuffed animals can be reused or recycled, yet only 15% of reusable textiles are recovered from the waste stream.
- The EPA reports only 2.3 million tons of used clothing and household textiles are recovered for reuse and recycling annually in the U.S., while more than 15 million tons is discarded in our nation's landfills and incinerators.

### Environmental Impact

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- Textile reuse and recycling has the second highest potential environmental impact on reducing greenhouse gases compared to other recyclables. Recycling 2.3 million tons of clothing per year is the equivalent of removing 1.3 million cars from U.S. roads<sup>1</sup>. The greenhouse gas reduction impact of other recyclables is as follows:
  - Yard trimmings = removing 220,000 cars
  - Glass = removing 210,000 cars
  - Plastic = removing 760,000 cars
  - Aluminum = removing 1.3 million cars
- Cotton is the most pesticide-dependent crop in the world. It takes one-third of a pound of pesticides to make one t-shirt.<sup>3</sup>
- Production of synthetic (petroleum-based) fibers like polyester and nylon produce volatile organic compounds, nitrous oxide (a greenhouse gas) and consume large amounts of water.

### Solution

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- **Donate!** Contrary to popular belief, donations in any condition are welcomed by most for-profit and nonprofit textile collectors alike. This includes stains, rips, missing buttons or broken zippers. The only unacceptable donations are wet/moldy items and items contaminated with oil or hazardous substances. See the full list of acceptable items in the media kit.



- **Where to donate.** Contact your municipal recycling coordinator or visit MassDEP's [Beyond the Bin Directory](#) to locate a textile collection location near you.
- **Do not** place clothing and other textiles in your curbside recycling bin. Items will get tangled in recycling machinery and can cause injury to workers.

## What Happens to Your Donation?

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- About 45% of donated textiles are reused and sold as secondhand apparel, either through charitable organizations or for-profit exporters that sell baled clothing to developing countries.
- Organizations such as Goodwill and Salvation Army operate retail stores where donated clothing and household items are sold. Clothing and textiles that don't sell in store are baled and sold to textile brokers. Both activities generate revenue to support the organizations' core missions.
- For-profit textile recyclers collect, sort and bale textiles and sell them to export markets. Clothing exports from North America supply high-quality products to local entrepreneurs in Africa, Latin America and other regions. 95% of the African population wears used clothing.
- Another 30% of donated textiles are converted to industrial wiping cloths for industries such as automotive and public works.
- 20% is sent to fiber conversion companies where textiles are broken down into their basic fiber components to be remanufactured into insulation for automotive vehicles or home, carpet padding, or sound-proofing material.
- The remaining 5% is thrown away because it is wet (mildewed) or stained with a hazardous solvent such as gasoline.

## About the Textile Recovery Initiative

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The Textile Recovery Initiative is a statewide effort of the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP), the Secondary Materials and Recycled Textiles Association (SMART), and the Council for Textile Recycling (CTR). The initiative encourages Massachusetts residents to donate unwanted clothing, footwear and other textile products to collection bins, for-profit and charitable organizations. The initiative aims to reduce the amount of textiles that end up in the waste stream by educating the public on ways to recover and reuse textiles.

### SOURCES

<sup>1</sup>Advancing Sustainable Materials Management: Facts and Figures 2013. U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Published June 2015.

<sup>2</sup>Based on data from Municipal Waste Combustor Class II Recycling Program Waste Characterization Studies, February & March 2011, available at <http://www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/massdep/recycle/reporters/waste-reduction-and-recycling.html>.

<sup>3</sup>Secondary Materials and Recycled Textiles Association: <http://www.smartasn.org/consumers/index.cfm#>.