

PROPER RECYCLING UNDERSTANDING CONSUMPTION

A Guide to doing it right in Lawrence and Mercer Counties.

What is Consumption?

Consumption is the purchase and use of goods and services. Most of the goods we purchase will ultimately end up as waste when their useful life is over. This waste must be disposed of properly, through reuse, recycling, or landfilling, to protect our health, economy, and environment.

On average, every person generates approximately 1,600 pounds of trash annually.

The diagram below from the Green Business Bureau (<https://greenbusinessbureau.com/>) illustrates the traditional product life cycle of a basic T-shirt. Notice that this is a very linear path that results in disposal via landfilling or municipal waste incineration.



Each step of this process uses a great deal of energy and resources and applies to every product we buy. Some processes, such as mining are very energy-intensive as the materials need extracted (mined), processed, and transported—all before they can even be manufactured into a product. This does not include the environmental damage associated with mining or the potential health impacts from the improper disposal of the more hazardous items such as televisions and household chemicals.

What are some Negative Aspects of Consumption with regard to the Environment and our Health?

The consumption equation does have negative impacts. This includes air, water, soil, and thermal pollution, climate change, deforestation, habitat destruction, and wasted energy and materials. There are many health issues that are directly caused by the pollution and impacts.

Consumption is expensive. By being an informed consumer, you can spend your money wisely on the goods and services you purchase

What is the solution?

One of the most important things we can do is to encourage manufacturers to strive for a sustainable product life cycle instead of the wasteful linear model. Practicing waste reduction, reuse, and recycling will have positive impacts on our environment, health, and economy. It is also important to design products with repair and recycling in mind. Not only do these practices reduce our need for virgin materials but they also save significant amounts of energy. This can save us on the products and services we use.

<https://lawrencecountypa.gov/departments/recycling-and-solid-waste>

www.mercercountypa.gov/recycling

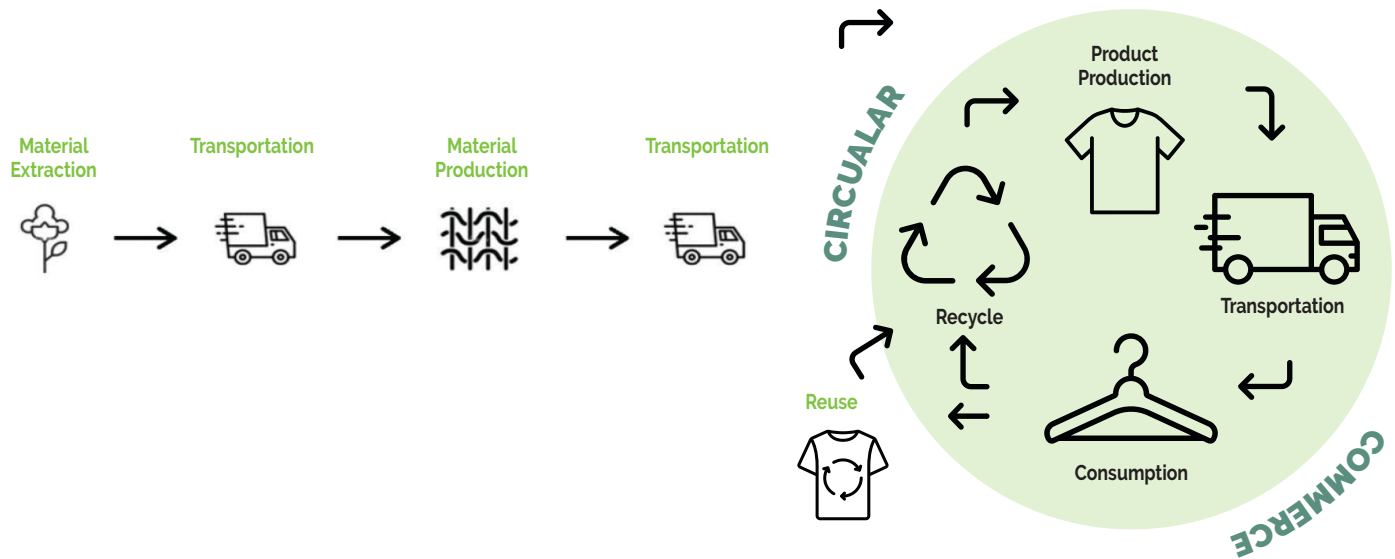


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Sustainable Product Life Cycle



This sustainable product life cycle is circular and avoids the farming or extraction of raw materials. Using recycled materials for manufacturing saves energy and conserves natural resources. It also requires that a product be manufactured with recyclability in mind. Sustainability requires a circular mindset, where nothing is lost and nothing is wasted.

What can we do?

We can start by practicing the three "Rs" - reduce, reuse, and recycle. Reducing our waste is the most important of the three "Rs." By reducing the amount of waste we generate in the first place, we have less to reuse, recycle, and most importantly, throw away. Some easy things to do include avoiding items with excess packaging, choosing reusable items such as a ceramic coffee mug over a paper or foam cup, buying locally grown food, growing your own garden, and being an informed consumer. Avoid single use plastics. Borrow, rent, or share infrequently used items such as tools and equipment.

Reuse is using an item over again, whether for its original purpose or an entirely different function. It is the second most important "R" and is pretty straightforward. Yard sales, flea markets, donation centers, repairing items, and repurposing an item such as a tire into a swing or planter are all examples of reuse. Reuse is a great way to use products to their fullest extent which saves money and resources.

Recycling is the processing of an item that would otherwise be thrown away as trash into a new product. Recycling saves significant amounts of energy and natural resources, and is one of the easiest ways to help address climate change. The avoided cost associated with energy usage and resource mining and processing results in money saved on the products and services that we purchase.

In a world of abundance, we are called to be increasingly thoughtful about the products we purchase. If something is worth owning, it is worth buying something of quality that will serve its purpose for a long time.

Be sure to check out our other fact sheets for more and detailed information about the three "Rs".

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This publication is funded in part through a grant from the PA Department of Environmental Protection.



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