

Who is SMART?

Secondary Materials and Recycled Textiles Association (SMART), established in 1932 SMART is a recycling-based, international, nonprofit trade association comprised of for profit used clothing, wiping material and fiber industry companies. SMART members use and convert recycled and secondary materials from used clothing, commercial laundries and nonwoven, off spec material, new mill ends and paper from around the world. SMART companies are committed to the “green” way of life.

Mission

The Secondary Materials and Recycled Textiles Association is a global organization of companies involved in the reuse and recycling of textiles and related secondary materials. “SMART” serves the common interests of its members through:

 Advocacy  Networking  Education

Vision

SMART is the leading industry voice promoting high standards and best practices for reuse and recycling of textiles and related secondary materials. Our members reduce solid waste, by collecting, reclaiming, and “close the loop” by processing, reusing, converting, and distributing these recyclables.

Membership

SMART members continually trumpet their message to the donating and recycling public by encouraging them to “Donate, Recycle, Don’t Throw Away.”

SMART companies are an economic stimulus through market creation, small business promotion, job creation, charitable funding, recycled product development and the stimulation of affordable clothing markets. The textile recycling industry in the U.S. provides a significant source of employment and revenue.

SMART currently represents nearly 150 companies, ranging in size from several to hundreds of employees. These companies are located all over the world with the majority in the United States, however the International membership rate is rapidly increasing. SMART member companies reuse and recycle both pre-consumer and post-consumer textiles. Most SMART member companies are family-owned businesses with fewer than 500 employees. The majority of these companies employ between 35 and 50 workers, many of whom are semi-skilled workers. The industry provides meaningful jobs for more than 20,000 people in the United States who locally drive our economy and preserve our environment.

What Our Member Companies Do

An estimated \$1 billion industry, SMART companies acquire both unused and used (pre-and post-consumer) textiles* for reuse and recycling purposes. SMART companies are diverse; however, the two core business models include SMART's pre-consumer and post-consumer markets:

Pre-consumer Market – material acquired prior to consumer use (pre-consumer).

SMART member businesses purchase secondary material** (by-product) from textile and fiber companies. The textile and fiber manufacturers would otherwise discard the unused material (by-product) that could not be used during the manufacturing process.

Once acquired, the material is inventoried and processed. SMART member companies then repurpose the excess material into a variety of consumer products (e.g. wiping cloths, automobile insulation and home furnishings, etc.).

Post-consumer Market – material acquired after consumer use (post-consumer).

SMART member companies purchase excess textile donations from charities and commercial sources (i.e. non-profits, thrift stores, hospitals, hotels and industrial laundries etc.). The purchase of unusable donations provides additional funds to charitable organizations and serves as a critical source of revenue to support their ongoing, community-based programs. Clothing collection bin programs are another convenient way consumers are able to recycle unwanted clothing and textiles. SMART encourages the public to educate themselves before utilizing a local clothing collection bin. Consumers should understand whether the bin operator is a for-profit or non-profit organization, they should be able to contact the operator and/or charitable partner, and they should observe that the bin is well maintained (i.e. the area around the bin is neat and clean).

SMART companies sort and grade the used clothing based on quality, condition, and type. Once sorted, the used clothing and textiles are reused and recycled in one of the following manners:

45% is re-used as apparel. These items are generally processed into large bales that are then sold in the U.S. to the secondhand clothing industry or are exported to emerging market nations where demand for top quality secondhand clothing is particularly high.

30% of the recovered textiles are cut into wiping rags or polishing cloths that are then used in commercial and industrial settings.

20% is reprocessed into its basic fiber content. The fibers are then remanufactured to create furniture stuffing, upholstery, home insulation, automobile sound-proofing, carpet padding, building materials and various other products.

5% is unusable. If the textiles are wet, moldy, or contaminated with solvents they are not fit for recycling, and are discarded.

SMART in the Industry

SMART has established Codes of Conduct whereby its members have agreed to abide by the ethical and moral standards outlined by the Association, thus distinguishing SMART members from other companies in the industry.

The Code of Conduct for clothing collection bins operated by SMART member companies requires the operator to abide by the following guidelines, clearly state whether they are a for-profit or non-profit organization:

- Provide contact information
- Obtain permission before placing the bin
- Obtain a permit (if applicable)
- Comply with local zoning regulations
- Service and maintain the bin on a regular schedule
- Respond in a timely manner to concerns

Ease and convenience is critical to increasing the public's participation in recycling programs. For example, curbside recycling of aluminum cans, paper products, plastic and glass has dramatically increased the recycling of those materials. Several municipalities have added curbside collection of clothing and textiles to their local recycling programs. Clothing collection bins are another convenient option that encourages the increased recycling of clothing and other household textiles.

SMART is continuously working to educate the public and local government officials about the importance of increasing clothing and textile reuse and recycling. The benefit of these educational outreach efforts is gaining momentum throughout the nation, including programs developed by SMART in New York, Massachusetts, Connecticut and Rhode Island.

The secondhand clothing industry is lauded by many, including Oxfam, an international aid organization. Oxfam points out, it "supports the livelihood of hundreds of thousands of people in developing countries who work in trading, distribution, repairing, restyling, washing, etc." International trade is a critical component of the textile industry's success. More than 60% of recovered textile waste is sent abroad to more than 100 countries, equating to more than 1.4 billion pounds of used clothing – creating hundreds of thousands of jobs worldwide.

It is estimated by the US EPA that only 16.2%¹ of clothing and textiles are being diverted from the waste stream for recycling purposes. More can and must be done to recapture these vital resources. Combined with the charitable industry, SMART's membership companies prevent more than 5 billion pounds¹ of post-consumer textile waste from hitting the solid waste stream each year.

¹ Source: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Report: Advancing Sustainable Materials Management: 2014 Tables and Figures, Table 2, p, 2 (December 2016).

*Textiles – items made from woven and non-woven cloth (such as wool and cotton fibers), vinyl and other artificial fabrics, also to include items made from fur or other animal skins.

**Secondary Materials – manufactured materials that have already been used at least once and are to be used again after recycling.

SMART FAQs

What can be recycled?

Any clothing, household textile or commercial linen textile as long as it is DRY and has NO ODOR can be reused and recycled. Even if the item is stained, torn, overly worn or out-of-date, do not throw it away; it has a use in the clothing recycling industry. Only items that are wet (mildewed) or have been used with a solvent-type liquid (gasoline, Goof Off, etc.) cannot be recycled.

Why should I recycle used clothing and household textiles?

Clothing and household textiles currently make up 6.3%² of the waste stream or the equivalent of 81 pounds per person thrown away annually in the US. Nearly 95% of used clothing and textiles can be reused and recycled. You can help reduce the amount of clothing and textile products going into landfills by reusing or recycling these materials.

What are some other benefits of textile reuse and recycling?

Textile reuse and recycling reduces the need to create more landfill space. It also reduces pollution created by incinerators. Used clothing provide low cost clothing to low income households all over the world. Recycling textiles saves the environment from tons of harsh chemicals, waste products and waste water used in the manufacturing of clothing as well.

Municipalities that manage their own landfills should know that 5-7% of all materials within the landfill are clothing and/or textiles that could have been reused or recycled. To extend the life of their solid waste facilities, municipalities should encourage the recycling of clothing and textiles, just as they do paper, plastic, glass and aluminum cans.

What is the environmental impact of clothing and textile recycling?

According to the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), 2.6 million tons of textiles are currently recycled annually.³ The EPA also reports that current clothing and textile recycling has a greater impact on reducing greenhouse gases than the recycling of yard waste, glass, and plastic.⁴ Reuse and recycling of clothing and textiles is the equivalent of removing 1.3 million cars from America's highways and is equal to the impact of aluminum recycling. It is more impactful than plastic recycling (670 thousand cars removed) and glass recycling (175,000 cars removed).

² U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Report: Advancing Sustainable Materials Management – 2014 Tables and Figures, Table 1, p. 1 (December 2016)

³ Ibid., Table 2, p. 2 (December 2016)

⁴ U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Report: Advancing Sustainable Materials Management – 2014 Fact Sheet, Table 5, p. 15 (November 2016)

♻️ Besides individual consumers, can businesses help recycle textiles?

Yes! Businesses are a very important recycling base and should be encouraged to do so. SMART member companies already work with the healthcare facilities; hotels and other hospitality facilities; textile and paper mills and manufacturers; cut and sew plants; textile dye facilities; retail stores (returned/obsolete merchandise) and commercial laundries and select government agencies and institutions. SMART members are sensitive to the special needs and requirements of these businesses and are careful to reuse and recycle them appropriately.

♻️ Does the used clothing market undermine new clothing businesses in developing countries?

No! According to SMART members, used clothing sales create jobs and affordable apparel in many lesser developed countries. Many people in these countries cannot afford locally made, new clothing. Many people in these countries earn their livelihood by selling used clothing. New clothing businesses in developing countries can make more money producing clothing for export to wealthier countries in Europe and North America than selling them locally.

♻️ How can local governments best manage the placement of clothing collection bins within their communities?

The more convenient a recycling option is to the public, the more likely it is to be utilized. To date, only a few municipalities have implemented curbside collection programs for clothing and other household textiles. The next most convenient option in the industry is clothing collection bins.

SMART has developed draft legislative language that cities and towns can use to write their own ordinances to establish the requirements for placing clothing collection bins. To promote transparency within the clothing and textile recycling industry, SMART's recommended legislative language requires the printing on the clothing bin be clear and easy-to-read. The information on the collection bin should clearly state the nature of the business/organization placing the clothing collection bin (for-profit/non-profit) as well as provide accurate contact information for the company. Additionally, the recommended legislative language requires the company placing the bin to pay all permit fees, to make regular collections from the bin, to respond in a reasonable amount of time to complaints, and, to obtain permission prior to placing a bin. SMART has worked with communities throughout North America to develop reasonable regulation of clothing collection bins.

Contact

Jackie King, SMART Executive Director

Jackie King serves as SMART's Executive Director and acts as the chief staff liaison to the SMART board of directors. She is responsible for the administration and implementation of SMART board policies and initiatives. She is the primary staff contact for media inquiries.

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