

Tahoe Communities Use Various Recycling Strategies

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Thanks to the careful research and creative thinking of Lake Tahoe's recycling professionals, our communities offer differing recycling approaches to meet the needs of each area. These approaches share the goal of reducing the amount of glass, paper, plastic and metal that are sent to the landfill each year to be buried in mountains of trash. When these materials are recycled, it reduces the need to constantly cut down forests and excavate new mines to meet our needs, helping us retain some natural resources for future generations.

Incline Village residents have a classic curbside recycling program. They place unbroken glass (clear, brown or green) in their green crate and metals and plastic (numbers 1 and 2) in their yellow crate. Newspapers and magazines are placed in grocery sacks, and office paper is put in plastic bags. Residents simply put their recyclables on the curb on the scheduled day. Call Waste Not at Incline Village GID, (775) 831-8603, or Independent Sanitation, (775) 831-2971, for details.

In South Lake Tahoe, the South Tahoe Refuse Company, Inc. (STR) has adopted the goal of achieving the highest rate of recycling at the lowest possible cost. California's Integrated Waste Management Act of 1989 required local agencies to reduce the amount of solid waste disposed of in landfills by 50 percent by the year 2000. Since that law passed, STR has increased the amount of materials recycled more than 15-fold, to over 30,000 tons per year. They use a bold strategy to

achieve this result.

South Tahoe Refuse built a Materials Recovery Facility (MRF) where a conveyor belt system is used to remove recyclables along a sorting line. While residents are encouraged to presort their recyclables and bag them separately, if they do not, the sorting will be done at the MRF. This system has proven effective for all of the South Shore, including in Douglas County. A major advantage is the ability to divert most recyclables from the landfill, even if many residents, businesses and tourists are not aware of or motivated to participate in the program.

In north- and west-shore communities in Placer County (including Truckee), a blend of the above two programs is used, called the Blue Bag Recycling program. The Tahoe-Truckee Sierra Disposal program simply requires customers to place dry, clean recyclable materials in special blue plastic bags, and to put the blue bags out with the trash on pick-up day. Residents do not need to keep separate containers for glass, metal and paper, as they are sorted at a new Materials Recovery Facility in Truckee. Like the South Shore program, this program allows recyclable materials to be picked up by the garbage trucks at the same time the household trash is picked up, reducing costs and traffic.

Other Recycling Programs

In addition to these basic services, Lake Tahoe

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recycling companies offer a host of related programs, including those for household hazardous waste, construction debris, cardboard, forest by-products and slash, pine needles, and Christmas trees. In addition to the Waste Not phone numbers given above, you can obtain more information by calling South Tahoe Refuse, (530) 541-0366, or Tahoe-Truckee Sierra Disposal, (530) 583-0148. Some auto parts stores and fire stations also accept used motor oil, antifreeze, and transmission fluid. These toxic substances should never be dumped on the ground or into a storm drain system.

Here are some ways to reduce household waste and protect the environment:

- Buy products made with recycled materials.
- If your community does not have a recycling program, support its formation.
- Learn about and avoid products that contain hazardous contents.
- Bring your own cloth bags to local stores, and keep a mug for coffee or water at work rather than using paper, plastic, or foam cups.
- Tell businesses that are making good environmental choices that you recognize and appreciate their efforts.
- Buy in bulk – you can purchase larger quantities with less packaging and save.
- Reduce organic waste by composting nonmeat food scraps and yard waste.
- Donate old clothing to thrift stores.

Remember, waste disposal is a complex problem, but individuals can make a significant impact. As William James said, “Act as if what you do makes a difference. It does.”