# **Recycling Stimulates Economic Development**

Neil Seldman. *BioCycle*, July 2012.

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*The US*[*recycling industry*](https://go-gale-com.ezproxy.cuyamaca.edu/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=Viewpoints&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchResultsType=MultiTab&searchType=BasicSearchForm&currentPosition=2&docId=GALE%7CEJ3010970203&docType=Viewpoint+essay&sort=Relevance&contentSegment=ZXAY-MOD1&prodId=OVIC&contentSet=GALE%7CEJ3010970203&searchId=R2&userGroupName=sdccd_cuyamaca&inPS=true)*has generated more than a million jobs—a figure that is expected to double as the demand for*[*recycled materials*](https://go-gale-com.ezproxy.cuyamaca.edu/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=Viewpoints&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchResultsType=MultiTab&searchType=BasicSearchForm&currentPosition=2&docId=GALE%7CEJ3010970203&docType=Viewpoint+essay&sort=Relevance&contentSegment=ZXAY-MOD1&prodId=OVIC&contentSet=GALE%7CEJ3010970203&searchId=R2&userGroupName=sdccd_cuyamaca&inPS=true)*continues to grow in the industrial and agricultural sectors. A wide variety of recycling, refurbishing, and repurposing programs across the country not only create jobs but also save taxpayers money and generate other significant economic benefits for local communities. One in particular, the privately owned building-materials salvage company Urban Ore in Berkeley,*[*California*](https://go-gale-com.ezproxy.cuyamaca.edu/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=Viewpoints&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchResultsType=MultiTab&searchType=BasicSearchForm&currentPosition=2&docId=GALE%7CEJ3010970203&docType=Viewpoint+essay&sort=Relevance&contentSegment=ZXAY-MOD1&prodId=OVIC&contentSet=GALE%7CEJ3010970203&searchId=R2&userGroupName=sdccd_cuyamaca&inPS=true)*, has redefined what is possible in the reclamation industry and has become a model for reuse stores around the world.*

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the U.S. recycling movement benefitted from the decentralized nature of our government. With 10,000 local governments each in charge of their own solid waste, it was possible for experimentation and sharing successful approaches across the country. Today in the midst of the Great Recession [2012], decentralized recycling is proving its worth to the country once again. The recycling industry has created well over 1 million jobs and is projected to add another million jobs as recycling levels continue to divert more and more material to industry and [agriculture](https://go-gale-com.ezproxy.cuyamaca.edu/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=Viewpoints&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchResultsType=MultiTab&searchType=BasicSearchForm&currentPosition=2&docId=GALE%7CEJ3010970203&docType=Viewpoint+essay&sort=Relevance&contentSegment=ZXAY-MOD1&prodId=OVIC&contentSet=GALE%7CEJ3010970203&searchId=R2&userGroupName=sdccd_cuyamaca&inPS=true). The level of experimentation continues. The following stories introduce just a fraction of the new job creating and job sustaining endeavors from around the U.S.

In Bridgeport, Connecticut, a mattress recycling and refurbishing enterprise started up in late June [2012]. Twenty [workers](https://go-gale-com.ezproxy.cuyamaca.edu/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=Viewpoints&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchResultsType=MultiTab&searchType=BasicSearchForm&currentPosition=2&docId=GALE%7CEJ3010970203&docType=Viewpoint+essay&sort=Relevance&contentSegment=ZXAY-MOD1&prodId=OVIC&contentSet=GALE%7CEJ3010970203&searchId=R2&userGroupName=sdccd_cuyamaca&inPS=true) will process 100,000 mattresses and box springs annually. This will reduce transfer station and landfill costs, while making good end products available to consumers at pennies on the dollar compared to new mattresses from formal retail stores. The plant is owned by the Greater Bridgeport Community Development Corporation, which used a $100,000 Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) to leverage additional capital.

*Austin [Texas] just released an extraordinary business plan for resource recovery that will guide the city to 90 percent diversion of discarded materials by 2020.*

MODEL PROGRAMS

An array of refurbishing operations in Eugene, Oregon—including mattresses, automobiles, appliances, [computers](https://go-gale-com.ezproxy.cuyamaca.edu/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=Viewpoints&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchResultsType=MultiTab&searchType=BasicSearchForm&currentPosition=2&docId=GALE%7CEJ3010970203&docType=Viewpoint+essay&sort=Relevance&contentSegment=ZXAY-MOD1&prodId=OVIC&contentSet=GALE%7CEJ3010970203&searchId=R2&userGroupName=sdccd_cuyamaca&inPS=true) and furniture—sell through 11 outlet stores run by Saint Vincent de Paul (SVDP). It is estimated these operations have helped lower the cost of living in Eugene by 3 percent. SVDP's total operations employ over 400 workers at living wages plus health insurance. SVDP also manufacturers products made from window glass and fire starters made from old crayons. Since the great recession of 2008, SVDP has hired over 100 new workers and raised wages.

In Reading, Pennsylvania, the new administration has hired its own workers at union wage and benefit levels to manage the city's recycling program. There are 10 new jobs and the city is expecting to save $300,000. Further, by controlling its own materials, Reading can direct these resources to companies that will locate manufacturing plants in the city. Reading will be the site of the first U.S. plant that uses 40 tons/day recycled high grade paper and recycled cotton to produce stationery, copy paper, envelopes and file folders for local and regional markets. The Greys Paper Recycling [Industries](https://go-gale-com.ezproxy.cuyamaca.edu/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=Viewpoints&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchResultsType=MultiTab&searchType=BasicSearchForm&currentPosition=2&docId=GALE%7CEJ3010970203&docType=Viewpoint+essay&sort=Relevance&contentSegment=ZXAY-MOD1&prodId=OVIC&contentSet=GALE%7CEJ3010970203&searchId=R2&userGroupName=sdccd_cuyamaca&inPS=true) plant will create 100 jobs at $14/hour, plus an additional 20 jobs in distribution and warehousing.

United Community Services, the city's workforce development agent, will identify, screen and recruit workers. Mayor Vaughn Spencer is introducing additional creative ways to use raw available materials for sustainable [economic growth](https://go-gale-com.ezproxy.cuyamaca.edu/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=Viewpoints&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchResultsType=MultiTab&searchType=BasicSearchForm&currentPosition=2&docId=GALE%7CEJ3010970203&docType=Viewpoint+essay&sort=Relevance&contentSegment=ZXAY-MOD1&prodId=OVIC&contentSet=GALE%7CEJ3010970203&searchId=R2&userGroupName=sdccd_cuyamaca&inPS=true).

In Alachua County, Florida, a 40-acre Resource Recovery Park has been created for recycling and [composting](https://go-gale-com.ezproxy.cuyamaca.edu/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=Viewpoints&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchResultsType=MultiTab&searchType=BasicSearchForm&currentPosition=2&docId=GALE%7CEJ3010970203&docType=Viewpoint+essay&sort=Relevance&contentSegment=ZXAY-MOD1&prodId=OVIC&contentSet=GALE%7CEJ3010970203&searchId=R2&userGroupName=sdccd_cuyamaca&inPS=true) companies. Similarly, an industrial park for these types of companies is being developed in Austin, Texas. Austin just released an extraordinary business plan for resource recovery that will guide the city to 90 percent diversion of discarded materials by 2020. The report will save cities seeking to replicate these goals hundreds of thousands of dollars in consulting fees.

URBAN AGRICULTURE

In Poughkeepsie, New York, the city is providing 4 acres to Greenway, Inc., a composting company, which will create the foundation for an intensive [urban agriculture](https://go-gale-com.ezproxy.cuyamaca.edu/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=Viewpoints&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchResultsType=MultiTab&searchType=BasicSearchForm&currentPosition=2&docId=GALE%7CEJ3010970203&docType=Viewpoint+essay&sort=Relevance&contentSegment=ZXAY-MOD1&prodId=OVIC&contentSet=GALE%7CEJ3010970203&searchId=R2&userGroupName=sdccd_cuyamaca&inPS=true) sector. Urban agriculture is essential for sustainable cities. David Crockett, director of the Office of Sustainability in Chattanooga, reports that if just 10 percent of the food eaten in the city were grown in the city, it would make a $1 billion impact on the local economy.

*Urban Ore has served as a model for large and small reuse stores all over the world.*

In Atlanta, urban agriculture is making considerable progress. Biponica, Inc. has produced two grow facilities at Park Department outdoor centers which grow fish using algae and duck weed as feed, and vegetables from the nutrients in fish excretions. Elemental Impact has established the downtown Zero Waste Zone to segregate organic waste for composting. This also makes it easier to recycle nonorganic discarded materials. Elemental Impact is also working with the city's airport, the busiest in the U.S., to capture back of the house and concourse organic waste, as well as the plastic packages used to deliver food to the facility. Elemental Impact is now working closely with the National Restaurant Association to establish these zones in many U.S. cities.

REUSE AND NICHE RECYCLING

Also in Atlanta, the faith-based organization Charitable Connections has recently expanded the Fuller Center, its restore that distributes used and new building materials to low-income customers. Charitable Connections also has established a recycled paint enterprise, as well as attracted an electronic scrap recycling company and a textile recycling company to the community.

In Berkeley, California, Urban Ore has served as a model for large and small reuse stores all over the world. The privately owned enterprise started in 1979 at the tipping face of the old Berkeley landfill, and recovered its first round of tools and equipment from the landfill itself. Incorporated as a Subchapter S corporation in 1980, Urban Ore is open 360 days a year, 10 hours a day. Conducting business under the motto "to end the age of waste," Urban Ore's staff diverts used building materials and other products from landfills and transfer stations by sorting, cleaning, organizing and selling products to individual customers and other reuse stores in the San Francisco Bay Area. It recovers reusable goods by scavenging under contracts from municipally-owned transfer stations in Berkeley and El Cerrito.

A WHOLE NEW DESIGNATION

In 1999, Urban Ore had to rewrite Berkeley's zoning law to be able to move across town onto the property it subsequently bought. With the cooperation of the Planning Department and the blessing of the City Council at the time, a new category of conservation business that can occupy Mixed Use/Light Industrial properties "as of right" was created. That designation is Materials Recovery Enterprise.

The enterprise now has 38 workers and grosses over $2.6 million annually. Recovered materials that cannot be sold are recycled. Urban Ore sends to landfill less than 2 percent of the 7,000 to 8,000 tons of materials and products that come its way each year. It was able to purchase most of its 3.2-acre facility in West Berkeley in 2009, with loans from the Small Business Administration, a local bank, and the Alameda County Source Reduction and Recycling Board. The company has a design service that has helped around 30 private industry and local governments in the U.S. and other countries to develop transfer stations that maximize recovery from businesses, haulers and individuals. Learn more at urbanore.com.

# **Why**[**Recycling**](https://go-gale-com.ezproxy.cuyamaca.edu/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=Viewpoints&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchResultsType=SingleTab&searchType=BasicSearchForm&currentPosition=3&docId=GALE%7CEJ3010970204&docType=Viewpoint+essay&sort=Relevance&contentSegment=ZXAY-MOD1&prodId=OVIC&contentSet=GALE%7CEJ3010970204&searchId=R1&userGroupName=sdccd_cuyamaca&inPS=true)**Is a Waste of Money, Time and Energy**

Edwin Decker, *San Diego City Beat*, January 8, 2013.

Freelance journalist Edwin Decker is a regular contributor to the *City Beat* newsweekly in San Diego and host of the popular podcast *Sordid Tales*.

*The idea that recycling is necessary is based on fallacies and faulty premises. First, it is simply untrue that landfill space is filling up; there is currently plenty of room for the waste Americans produce and then still plenty more room for landfill expansion. Recycling also does not save money; curbside recycling costs significantly more than it does to dump waste in a landfill. On balance, recycling isn't even beneficial to the planet because of all the carbon-intensive resources—such as garbage trucks and industrial recycling plants—that are used to facilitate the process from start to finish. Recycling is a feel-good bandwagon that simply isn't worth it.*

As a fence-sitting political independent, I've taken a lot of grief over the years from my mostly Democratic friends who say it's a copout to avoid picking a side. And while I adore the progressive attitude of the Democratic Party, celebrate its alliance with intellectualism and get all weepy over its institutional empathy for the underdog, the truth is, liberalism—when left unchecked—will go from zero to shitty in 60 seconds.

When a problem is identified, liberals tend to lurch into action. This is a noble (yet dangerous) instinct, and woe be the sorry sap who gets in the way of the Rebel-beral with a Cause. Indeed, I can think of no better example than curbside recycling.

The reasons for recycling, we're told, is that it's good for the environment and saves money and we're running out of landfill space. And anyone who doesn't agree with this must hate the planet and want to kill Bambi. Well color me a Bambivore, because it's all deer shit.

*As for the other proposed reasons for recycling, that it saves money and is good for the environment, there are a lot of smart, informed people who say that it does neither.*

For the most part, the hysteria over diminishing landfill space erupted in 1989 when J. Winston Porter, then an administrator for the [Environmental Protection](https://go-gale-com.ezproxy.cuyamaca.edu/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=Viewpoints&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchResultsType=SingleTab&searchType=BasicSearchForm&currentPosition=3&docId=GALE%7CEJ3010970204&docType=Viewpoint+essay&sort=Relevance&contentSegment=ZXAY-MOD1&prodId=OVIC&contentSet=GALE%7CEJ3010970204&searchId=R1&userGroupName=sdccd_cuyamaca&inPS=true) Agency (EPA), wrote a report saying that America was running out of places to put its trash. Porter's egregiously incorrect conclusion was based on the fact that nearly 3,000 landfills had shut down between 1982 and 1987. However, had he performed even the slightest bit of research, he'd have learned that, while the number of landfills had decreased, the size of each of the remaining fills had increased—by, on average, 20 times.

THE LANDFILL-SPACE FALLACY

In a phone interview, Jim Thompson, president of the *Waste Business Journal*, explained that in the early '80s, most of the country's 6,000 or 7,000 landfills were run by small, unregulated municipalities. Many of these facilities had to shut down due to increasing restrictions: Landfills may not be located near [groundwater](https://go-gale-com.ezproxy.cuyamaca.edu/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=Viewpoints&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchResultsType=SingleTab&searchType=BasicSearchForm&currentPosition=3&docId=GALE%7CEJ3010970204&docType=Viewpoint+essay&sort=Relevance&contentSegment=ZXAY-MOD1&prodId=OVIC&contentSet=GALE%7CEJ3010970204&searchId=R1&userGroupName=sdccd_cuyamaca&inPS=true), the lining system must be a multilayered combination of impermeable clay, gravel, sheeting and drainage; the methane gas must be either flared off or recycled periodically. These regulations forced many of the smaller operations out of business, and they were replaced by corporate "mega-landfills" that could afford all the retrofits and other legal requirements. The point is, there was, and is, no shortage of landfill space, and even Porter—now president of the Waste Policy Center, a consultancy firm for businesses and government agencies—has backed away from that claim.

As for the other proposed reasons for recycling, that it saves money and is good for the environment, there are a lot of smart, informed people who say that it does neither. Using data provided by Franklin Associates (an EPA-sanctioned waste consulting firm), Daniel K. Benjamin (author of *The 8 Great Myths of Recycling*) reported that "overall curbside recycling costs run between 35 and 55 percent higher than the [landfill] option."

Even the voraciously pro-curbside-recycling Porter reported (on the "Recycling" episode of the Showtime series, *Bullshit!*) that it costs local governments an average of $150 per ton to recycle, but only $50 or $60 a ton to dump it in a landfill.

WORTH THE PRICE?

But, hey, if it's good for the planet, it's worth the price, right? Well, sure, it would be—if it weren't that the whole recycling operation is, in itself, just another pumping, smoking, leaking, spewing, spilling, poisoning, polluting mega-machine. Forget about all those extra, specialized recycling trucks (which use more fuel and emit more carbon dioxide); forget about all the leaflets and other mailing materials used to inform the public about correct recycling behavior; forget about the added manpower and its carbon footprint—recycling plants pollute as much as any manufacturing plant, maybe worse because they use acids, colorants, stabilizers, retardants and lubricants during processing, causing a runoff [sludge](https://go-gale-com.ezproxy.cuyamaca.edu/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=Viewpoints&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchResultsType=SingleTab&searchType=BasicSearchForm&currentPosition=3&docId=GALE%7CEJ3010970204&docType=Viewpoint+essay&sort=Relevance&contentSegment=ZXAY-MOD1&prodId=OVIC&contentSet=GALE%7CEJ3010970204&searchId=R1&userGroupName=sdccd_cuyamaca&inPS=true) more noxious than [grunge rocker] Courtney Love's radioactive douchebag magma.

Now, it could be argued, as Jim Thompson did, that recycling could be viable someday and may not be a waste of time and money. Perhaps. Certainly reasonable minds can disagree. My point is: Why were the pros and cons not thoroughly discussed before the blue bins started showing up? Why didn't we listen to The Borg [from *Star Trek*] when they said, "Recycling is futile"? They should know. They're The Borg!

The whole thing reminds me of the No Nukes campaign of the 1970s. Somehow we were led to believe that nuclear power and nuclear bombs posed the same threat. If you disagreed, you were branded a lover of radiation sickness. So they stopped building nuclear plants. However, had an intelligent discussion played out at the time, we'd have learned that nuclear power is the safest, most efficient and most environmentally friendly of all the energy options, and if we continued making newer and better nuclear plants back then, we might not be having so many energy problems today.

This is why I can't fully sign on to the liberal worldview. This is why, for all its buffoonery and bigotry, we still need conservatism to keep progressivism on a leash. This is why I remain, ever so proudly, in the middle, where rational people realize the world is too complex to see problems through partisan eyes.