Caring for Creation March 2017 Pilgrim Article

What Happens When I Throw Away Clothing or Shoes?

Reduce, Reuse, Recycle. We see these words, and we think of bottles, cans, and paper products. But let’s apply these practices to clothing, shoes, and household textiles, because Americans throw away 26 billion pounds of clothing and textiles per year – that’s 70 pounds of clothing per person, and 5.2% of the waste stream. And while 95% of unwanted clothing and textiles can be re-used or recycled, 85% ends up in a landfill, where it slowly degrades, releasing greenhouse gases, and leaching chemicals, which may seep into groundwater if the landfill is not sealed properly.

The EPA estimates that textile recycling has a greater impact on reducing greenhouse gases than recycling yard waste, glass or plastic. Recycling those 26 billion pounds of clothing is the equivalent of taking 7.3 million cars and their carbon dioxide emissions off the road. So what happens to the clothing that is recycled?

* 45% is reused as apparel in the US or abroad
* 30% is repurposed as rags or wiping clothes for commercial or industrial use
* 20% is reprocessed into upholstery fill, insulation, or carpet
* 5% is unusable due to mildew or other contamination

Fortunately, there are many places where we can recycle clothing, shoes, and textiles – local thrift stores, some retailers, and during the month of March our church will recycle denim.

Savers (2900 Highland Avenue, Downers Grove) takes clothing and household textiles – even single socks and tattered clothing is accepted and recycled. See [www.savers.com/donate](http://www.savers.com/donate)

Goodwill Store and Donation Center (110 Ogden Avenue, Downers Grove) recycles clothing and textiles.

In March bring your old denim jeans, shorts, jackets, or shirts to church, and the Caring for Creation team will take this to the Madewell store in Oak Brook mall, which participates in the Blue Jeans Go Green initiative. If you miss the March drive, Madewell is accepting denim for recycling all year long.

Other retailers accept clothing for recycling. H&M and Levi Strauss will take any brand of clothing or shoes. Patagonia will recycle only Patagonia clothing.

In addition to recycling, here are a few more things you can do:

* First of all, buy less, and save money, closet space, and ultimately landfill space. Consider how many times you will actually wear the garment, and what will happen to it after you’re done with it.
* When you do buy clothes, look for durable, classic styles that will last multiple years. Shop resale shops – Elite Repeats on Ogden Avenue in Westmont carries designer labels.
* Repair your clothing. Many dry cleaners or tailor shops repair seams and minor rips.
* Wash your clothes less – not only will they will last longer, but you’ll save energy - 80% of the energy consumption of a garment is in washing and drying.

For more information of clothing recycling, check out these sites: [www.smartasn.org/consumers/index.cfm](http://www.smartasn.org/consumers/index.cfm) (Secondary Materials and Recycled Textiles) and [www.earth911.com/recycling-guide/how-to-recycle-clothing-accessories/](http://www.earth911.com/recycling-guide/how-to-recycle-clothing-accessories/)

Refer to the Caring for Creation web site, at <http://uccdg-caring-for-creation.weebly.com/> , for other recycling tips and environmental issue updates.