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Holey socks, they go in the donation box!

By Claire Galkowski, Executive Director, South Shore Recycling Cooperative

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Are you done with those tattered towels? That coffee-stained shirt? Your cast-offs are still too good for the trash!

Audits performed recently at several Mass. disposal facilities revealed that over 5% of our trash is composed of used but useful textiles. That adds up to 240,000 tons, or 73 pounds of clothes, footwear and household “soft-wear” that the average Massachusetts resident burns or buries each year.



It’s time to clear up the misperception that charities and textile recyclers only want “gently used” items. The fact is even the shabbiest old cloth, leather or stuffed item in your house that is deposited in a textile donation box (not your household recycling bin) will be repurposed.

“All clean, dry clothing and household textiles - tablecloths, shoes, belts, and stuffed animals - can be recycled”, says Larry Groipen, past President of the Secondary Materials and Recycled Textiles Association (SMART) and chief of ERC Wiping Products in Lynn. “Even if they are stained or damaged, there is a use for the material.”

What happens to your castoffs after you drop them in a textile donation box? Whether the box belongs to Bay State Textiles, Big Hearted Books and Clothing, Goodwill, Salvation Army, or the dozens of other entities, 95% of items find a second life.

The “good stuff” is often sold in local thrift stores, raising money for charities and providing bargain clothing for us and our neighbors.

Thrift store rejects are hand sorted by rag graders. Some go to developing countries, where families depend on low-cost used items. Shoe and clothing repair is a thriving industry in resource poor nations.

Workers at Groipen’s Lynn business cut and sell absorbent rags to machine shops, car washes, marinas, etc. as wiping cloths.

Millbury Textiles near Worcester employs dozens of people who shred donated discards to make furniture stuffing, insulation and carpet padding. Even zippers and buttons are recycled. Shredded polyester is spun into new fabric.

The “rag” business supports training programs for struggling citizens to develop work skills, and adds value to materials that would otherwise be wasted. Proceeds from the sale of all the grades of textiles cover collection and processing costs, and often provides funding for charities and local organizations.

Paul Curry of Bay State Textiles stresses that "Everything should be dry, but we accept the good-gently used clothing, the bad -those ripped jeans with the broken zipper, and the ugly, that sweater Aunt Edna gave you in 1978". BST shares the revenue with several area municipalities and schools.

Recycling isn't just good for our paper, cardboard and containers. We help the planet and the economy by recycling all our textiles too. Find a donation box near you at ssrcoop.info (Other Stuff tab) to give your holey socks a new purpose.

Sources:

MassDEP Municipal Waste Combustor Class II Recycling Program Waste Characterization Studies, 2013 detailed spring and summer <http://www.mass.gov/eea/docs/dep/recycle/priorities/wcssumm.xls>

MassDEP 2014 Solid Waste Update, Table 2

<http://www.mass.gov/eea/docs/dep/recycle/priorities/14swdata.pdf>