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Recycling through the Reuse program

By Ashley Louisiana

Growing up in Moraga, my mom would get excited when it was "pick-up day." She would get up early and drive around picking up the goods she wanted from the curb that others no longer needed. She would come home with new kitchen gadgets and household items. The good news for our unsuspecting neighbors, she retired almost 10 years ago and doesn't live in the area.

Coming full circle and working as the Program Manager at RecycleSmart, I am now carrying on my mom's legacy of finding good homes for usable cast-offs, but in a more organized (and legal) way. I help manage a unique program our communities can feel proud to be part of, called Reuse & Cleanup Days. The program was started in 1999 to respond to the environmental, social, and economic issues impacting Contra Costa County. Twice a year on pre-scheduled days, all 65,000 single-family homes in the RecycleSmart service area can set out gently used household items at the curb, at no additional cost, to be picked up by Mt. Diablo Resource Recovery (MDRR).

I recently visited the 18,000 sq. ft. warehouse in Pittsburg where all the reusable items collected from the curb are taken. The warehouse is more organized than many homes, thanks to the dedicated staff of MDRR, Jim Nejedly and Adriana Medina. It was a bustling scene of incoming trucks and a sorting crew separating small furniture, appliances, electronics, clothing, home décor, medical supplies, school supplies and books, scrap metal and batteries. Almost 20 tons of batteries were collected in 2022 on Reuse Day!

Adriana had so many stories of where our central Contra Costa reuse items end up, from the Paradise fire victims to Contra Costa schools needing sporting equipment. She happily connected me with "Make it Home," a nonprofit in Walnut Creek that Social Services uses to help furnish apartments for those previously unhoused or aging out of the foster care system. "Giving is not just about making a donation. It's about making a difference," says Adriana, as she expressed how fortunate she feels to see the faces of families receiving something they need. Furniture in usable condition is the number one item needed.

Since RecycleSmart contracted with MDRR in 2015, over 22 million pounds of reuse items have been donated to East Bay Depot for Creative Reuse, St. Vincent DePaul, HOPE Solutions, Homeless Action Coalition, Uplift Family Services and many other charitable organizations. Over 32,000 homes placed reusable items at the curb in 2022, and RecycleSmart saw the program's highest participation in 2020-2021 when we all had plenty of time to clean house. Residents can also take advantage of the Cleanup Day provided by Republic Services, the day after the Reuse Day, for any junk or unusable materials.

Reuse of materials is even better for the environment and the community than recycling. RecycleSmart is a national leader in curbside collection of reusable items and has inspired other communities to develop similar programs. We are proving the old adage that one person's trash is another person's treasure. To learn more about the Reuse & Cleanup Days Program, or to look up your upcoming dates with our new search tool, visit [RecycleSmart.org/Cleanup](https://www.RecycleSmart.org/Cleanup).

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