



Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, Repurpose

By Rick Keller

Climate change focuses our attention on getting greenhouse gases out of our air and moving to clean, renewable sources of energy. The environment will also benefit from our practicing the 4Rs; reducing how much we use, choosing reusable products, buying items that can be recycled, and repurposing items that have more than one purpose. This article focuses on recycling in Arlington, Alexandria and Falls Church, the three Northern Virginia communities inside the Beltway.



All three jurisdictions have “single-stream” recycling. This simply means that all items accepted for recycling may be placed in a single container for pick-up. You don’t have to separate newspapers from bottles, for example—but you *do* need to know what materials are recyclable, and that may vary because each jurisdiction has its own trash and recycling contract.

I learned some things from using the information provided to me as a resident of Arlington. First, that plastic bags should not be placed in the recycle bin. This is fairly new: when recycling of items other than newspapers started, plastic bags were initially accepted. I didn’t have many and reused them as small trash bags when possible. But if one tore, in the recycle bin it went, along with the thin plastic bags, packed together, that my newspapers are delivered in.

Processors quickly found out that these plastic bags jammed the material sorters and so they were taken out of the contracts. So all local jurisdictions will tell you to take plastic bags to participating grocery stores where there are bins for their collection. Shredded paper likewise

is not liked by the sorting machines. It's better to use the free shredding offered by your jurisdiction rather than add paper to your trash.

City of Alexandria

You can get the basic information on the City's recycling program by going to <https://www.alexandriava.gov/Recycling>. To discover what you should put in your recycling cart there is a [graphic](#) available, and for items that are not suitable for trash or recycling, there's a [list](#) that tells you how to dispose of the item(s).

City of Falls Church

To find out about the Falls Church recycling program visit <http://www.fallschurchva.gov/399/Recycle>. You will find news about special recycling events and get information on collection dates and how to obtain a cart. To be informed as to what are appropriate items for the recycling bin, check out Falls Church's handy [poster graphic](#). The City website also includes information on items that the City does not recycle, but other places may. Visit [this page](#) to find out what your alternatives are.

Arlington County

Arlington's web information breaks down trash and recycling by type of facility: residential (single family), apartments/condos, and business. Businesses and multi-family have specific requirements that may be found through <https://recycling.arlingtonva.us/>.

Basic recycling information for home owners may be found at <https://recycling.arlingtonva.us/residential/trash-recycling/>. More detailed information on what may be recycled is available through an [online tool](#): this provides a look-up mechanism where you can enter an item and find out if it is recyclable and, if it is not, how you may properly dispose of the item(s).

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