

Steel Recycling Starts in the Home

A Guide to Residential Steel Recycling



What are steel cans?

We rely on steel packaging for our food to be in durable, tamper resistant containers. You may not realize it, but you probably use at least one steel can every day. You may hear them called tin cans, metal cans or aluminum cans, but most food cans truly are made of steel. Steel cans package a variety of products, including fruits, vegetables, soups, sauces, meats, juice, pet food, cleaning products, shoe polish, paint and coffee. Steel cans are also something else—recyclable.

An important distinction should be made between recyclable and recycled for materials. While almost any product can say it is recyclable in some fashion, most materials boast a very inefficient, intensive recycling process. Steel, on the other hand, is continuously and efficiently RECYCLED. In fact, more steel is recycled each year than paper, plastic, aluminum and glass combined. When steel is recycled, it conserves energy and natural resources, as well as making the process more financially sustainable.

How do you prepare steel cans for recycling?

Basically, all you have to do is use them. Once steel cans are used, make sure there is no remaining food in the cans by rinsing them out. Place the steel lids inside the cans as well since both can be recycled. If your community recycling program accepts empty steel aerosol cans or empty steel paint cans, they should also accept these cans as recyclable materials. (Check your local recycling program about steel with the Steel Recycling Locator.) Just make sure the container is empty.

How do communities collect steel cans for recycling programs?

Communities may collect through curbside collection, drop-off sites or multi-material buyback recycling centers. In some communities, household refuse may be sent to a resource recovery facility (or waste-to-energy facility), where steel cans are automatically removed for recycling by magnets. This means that the steel cans are magnetically separated and recycled even when they're placed in the trash. However, not every city has this type of service, so it's encouraged to place your steel household products in the recycling bin every time.

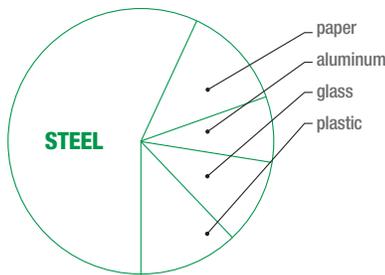
IN A YEAR, THE STEEL INDUSTRY CONSERVES THE EQUIVALENT ENERGY TO POWER ABOUT 18 MILLION HOMES FOR 12 MONTHS, OR ENOUGH TO PROVIDE THE CITY OF LOS ANGELES POWER FOR ROUGHLY EIGHT YEARS.





By recycling one ton of steel, 2500 pounds of iron ore, 1400 pounds of coal and 120 pounds of limestone are conserved.

Steel Recycling vs Other Materials



What other sites are used for collecting steel containers for recycling?

On-site recycling programs may be established anywhere steel containers are used, including restaurants, hotels, hospitals, and many other establishments that have foodservice facilities.

What happens to steel cans after they are collected?

A recycling truck takes the steel cans and other materials from the curbside, drop-off site or buyback center and hauls them to a material recovery facility (MRF). At the MRF, the steel cans are magnetically separated from the other recyclables, crushed into large cubes called bales, and then shipped to steel mills or foundries for recycling. The steel cans are then combined with other steel scrap from other recycling locations, taken to a steel mill and melted in a furnace to make new steel for many new steel products which can include automobiles, appliances, construction materials or another container.

While many packaging materials have to be “downcycled” into lesser products, steel can be continuously recycled into any common steel product without a loss of quality.

What other steel products are recycled?

Many steel products are recycled every day. Steel from appliances, automobiles and construction materials is routinely recycled. There are typically 60 to 80 million tons of steel scrap recycled per year into new steel products in North America.

What does it mean to “buy recycled?”

The term “buy recycled” refers to ways that you can help maintain steel’s continuous recyclability through buying products that are made of recycled materials. Steel scrap is a vital ingredient in making new steel; melting the scrap to make new steel is fundamental to energy and emissions savings and resource conservation. All steel contains a minimum of 25 percent recycled material, so when you buy a steel product, whether it is a paper clip, an appliance or a steel-framed home, you can be sure you are “buying recycled.”

STEEL CAN BE CONTINUOUSLY RECYCLED INTO ANY COMMON STEEL PRODUCT WITHOUT A LOSS OF QUALITY.

What are the benefits of recycling steel?

Recycling steel helps save landfill space while providing a valuable scrap resource to the steel industry. Using old steel to make new steel also preserves natural resources and energy. For every ton of steel recycled, 2,500 pounds of iron ore, 1,400 pounds of coal and 120 pounds of limestone are conserved. And in a year, the steel industry conserves the equivalent energy to power about 18 million homes for 12 months, or enough to provide the city of Los Angeles power for roughly eight years.

About the Steel Recycling Institute

The Steel Recycling Institute (SRI), a unit of the American Iron and Steel Institute, educates the solid waste management industry, government, business and, ultimately, the consumer about the economic and environmental benefits of recycling steel. SRI works to ensure the continuing development of the steel recycling infrastructure.



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