



The Circular Economy

Thinking about Waste as a Resource

What is the circular economy?

An **economy** involves all activities related to the production, consumption, and trade of goods and services. If an economy extracts the necessary resources, uses the resources to create a product, and then disposes of resources when the product is no longer needed, it is called a **linear economy**. This is because materials move in a line from resource extraction to waste disposal. This type of economy leads to large amounts of waste and puts a strain on our natural resource systems.

In contrast, a **circular economy** aims to retain and recover as much of a resource as possible by reusing, repairing, or recycling products and materials.¹ This type of economy keeps resources in use longer and reduces the strain on natural resource systems, allowing them to replenish.



Did you know?

A circular economy is connected to the UN Sustainable Development Goal 12: **Responsible Consumption and Production**.

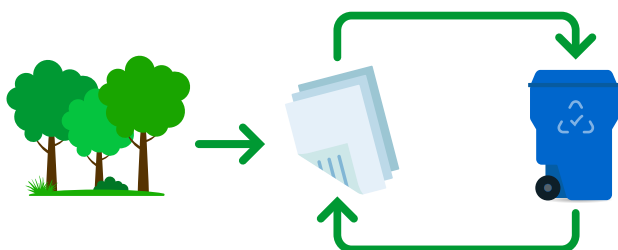


12 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION

What is the circular economy?



Let's take a look at the life of a piece of paper. In a linear economy, trees would be cut down to produce a sheet of paper, the paper would be used once, and then it would be thrown into the waste bin. Every time more paper is required, more trees would need to be cut down.



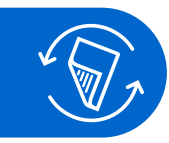
In a circular economy, the paper would be used, reused on the other side, and once it could not be used anymore, it would be recycled into a new sheet of paper or paper product. In this case there would be no need to cut down more trees and use brand new natural resources to create more paper. We can create new things from the resources that are already in use.

Did you know?

Recycled paper production uses 33% less energy and releases 37% less CO₂ than conventional paper production.²



1. Environment and natural resources Canada. (2022). [Circular Economy](#), Retrieved 2022
2. Environmental Paper Network. (2012). [Comparing Recycled to Virgin Paper](#). Retrieved 2022



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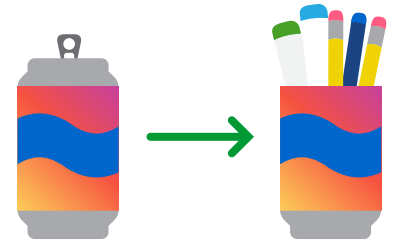
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Options in a Circular Economy

Though recycling is a key part of a circular economy, we can keep resources from becoming waste by reusing them. Reusing is a creative way to extend the life of a product and it can take many forms, such as: repairing, refurbishing, remanufacturing, and repurposing.

Before sending a product to the landfill, we can ask ourselves:

- Is there someone else who could reuse this product as is?
- Is there a way I could repurpose this product by finding another use for it?
- Is there a way to repair or refurbish this product?
- Are there any parts that could be used to remanufacture a similar product?
- Is this product something that I can recycle?



Did you know?

In Canada, the average person creates about 700 kg of waste a year!³ That's as much as an adult male buffalo.



Circular Economy Principles in the School Community

There are many ways we can bring the principles of a circular economy into our individual lives and school community. Below are EcoSchools actions that support the circular economy. Find additional guidance and resources for these actions on the [EcoSchools Certification Application](#):



GOOS paper



Divert Textile



Sort Your Waste



Recycle Personal Electronic Waste



Repurposing and Innovative Recycling



Conduct a Waste Audit

3. Environment and natural resources Canada. (2022). [Circular Economy](#), Retrieved 2022