

What gets recycled?

Neal Road facility sees sharp spike in e-waste and lots of cardboard

BY DEBBIE ARRINGTON

What we recycle keeps evolving. Loads brought to Butte County's Neal Road Recycling and Waste Facility are constant reminders.

Take electronic waste, for example. All those old computers and televisions really add up.

"Prior to COVID, NRRWF received about 12,000 units per year," explains Valerie Meza, Butte County's Recycling Coordinator. "In 2020, NRRWF received 32,000 units as our local labor force worked from home. In doing so, many consumers bought new computers and TVs."

And the old ones had to go somewhere. Fortunately, e-waste is on the list of household items the facility can accept for recycling.

Along with purchases of new electronics, the pandemic also brought a surge in online shopping—and shipping. That trend already was on the upswing before people had to stay at home.

"More than 90% of products in the United States are shipped in corrugated cardboard boxes," notes Meza. "This type of cardboard can actually be recycled up to seven times, making it an ideal reusable choice for a variety of uses."

Recycled cardboard often becomes more packaging, but it also can be turned into furniture and a variety of paper products such as paper towels, tissues, writing paper and newspaper.

In 2021, the NRRWF recycled 85.75 tons of cardboard, Meza says. But there's a lot more cardboard out there that's not getting

recycled. "Cardboard sent to recycling is approximately 68% of what is collected, and of that only 60% is reused to create new products."

By weight, tires represent a huge chunk of stuff not going into the landfill. "(In 2021), 234.96 tons of tires were recycled at the NRRWF," Meza says.

That's a service that's already paid for, she adds, and the consumer doesn't have to haul the tires to the landfill. "(On tire purchase), customers pay a \$1.50 recycling fee for the tire retailer to recycle the used tires. All the consumer needs to do is allow the retailer to remove the used tire upon changing them."

Mattress recycling also is paid for at purchase. Annually, NRRWF accepts about 18,000 mattresses as part of the Mattress Recycling Council's Bye-Bye Mattress program.

Recycling used carpet has been a popular addition to NRRWF's services. It recycled 24.40 tons in 2021.

"The carpet recycling program is new to the NRRWF," Meza says. "Carpet is recycled into insulation and plastic resin."

Scrap metal is baled and exported to overseas buyers in China or Turkey, where the market and demand fluctuates.

"End of life product management is essential to develop a circular economy," Meza says. "The success of NRRWF's mattress and e-waste recycling programs is evidence that product stewardship works. But to truly develop a circular economy, it will take Federal and State leadership so that we're not reliant on foreign countries."

"(Corrugated) cardboard can actually be recycled up to seven times, making it an ideal reusable choice for a variety of uses."

VALERIE MEZA
Recycling Coordinator,
Butte County



DROP OFF THESE ITEMS TO BE RECYCLED

NRRWF operates a self-service recycling drop-off area. Several items are accepted at no charge:

- Mattresses and box springs.
- Electronic waste such as computers, TVs, microwaves, stereos and VCRs. Anything with a cord, such as vacuum cleaners, is trash.
- Cardboard. Must be flattened. No Styrofoam.
- Scrap metal. NRRWF cannot accept car or boat motors. Lawnmowers are acceptable if all fluids (including fuel and oil) are drained.
- Auto batteries.
- Bicycles. Bikes in good condition are collected by non-profit benevolent organizations that refurbish the bikes and distribute them to needy children. Lower-quality bikes are sent to the scrap metal pile.

Some items are accepted for a small fee:

- Freon units (refrigerators, freezers, etc.), \$15 each. Food and doors must be removed.
- Washing machines, \$6 each.
- Hot water heaters, \$6 each.
- Carpet, \$6 per roll. No padding, no tack strips, no area rugs.

ADDRESS: Neal Road Recycling and Waste Facility
1023 Neal Road,
Paradise, CA 95969

HOURS: 7 a.m. to 4 p.m. daily.
Closed New Year's Day, Easter, Fourth of July, Thanksgiving and Christmas.

PHONE: (530) 345-4917

WEBSITE: <https://www.buttecounty.net/publicworks>



Learn more at www.buttecounty.net/recyclebutte/