



# Should we cut back on recycling?

It's not a perfect solution, and many people say it's time to trash it.

## What you need to know

- Recycling programs became common in the US in the 1960s. In 1960, 94% of household waste went into landfills. By 2018, the amount dropped to 52%.
- Recycling guidelines and laws vary by town, city, and state. For example, some places may accept milk cartons and plastic toys but not hardcover books or light bulbs.
- Only 32% of glass, cardboard, plastic, and paper and 1% of rigid plastics are recycled in the US. Of households that have the option to recycle, 59% do.



**DID YOU KNOW?**  
In 1980, Woodbury, New Jersey, became one of the first US cities to start picking up people's recycling at the curb.

The world produces billions of tons of waste, with the number only predicted to go up, and recycling is an important solution. Recycling materials requires fewer resources, like electricity and water, than creating new materials from scratch. For example, recycling glass instead of manufacturing new glass uses 40% less energy. Making new aluminum uses 95% more energy than recycling it. But recycling is also an imperfect, expensive, and time-consuming process that requires big trucks, people to collect and sort materials, and pricey equipment. Some people say we need to focus on better solutions. What do you think? Should we cut back on recycling?

## Yes—it's not as simple as it seems

We should focus our efforts on generating less waste to begin with. Recycling gives people a false sense of accomplishment, like they're doing their part and don't have to cut consumption. That's not true! Recycling cuts greenhouse gas emissions by 2% to 3%, but buying less reduces emissions by up to 20%. The global recycling system is also unfair. Wealthy countries, like the US, produce the most waste but ship recycled materials to Asia and Africa, which may not have the resources to process it properly. It can end up in landfills or getting burned and polluting the air, which damages the environment and people's health.

## No—it's still better than nothing

Recycling may not be perfect, but it's still better than throwing things away. Taking a moment to sort waste serves as an important reminder to be mindful of our consumption and buy only what we need. We can make the system better by focusing on materials that are more easily recycled, like aluminum, glass, and paper. Recycling paper uses 80% less wood than making new paper. And while recycling systems are complex and costly, they also create jobs and bring in a great deal of money—a total of 1.1 million jobs and \$236 billion per year, according to the National Recycling Coalition. That's important for families and the economy.

## YES Three reasons we should cut back on recycling

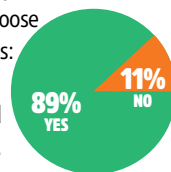
- 1 We need to focus on buying and using less so there isn't so much trash to begin with.
- 2 When people recycle, they think they're doing their part and don't have to cut back on buying things, which isn't true.
- 3 The system isn't fair to less wealthy nations that take in recycled materials but may not be able to process them properly.

## NO Three reasons we should not cut back on recycling

- 1 Recycling reminds us to buy only what we need and use it to the fullest. It makes us aware of our responsibility to the planet.
- 2 We can improve the system by focusing on the materials that are most effective and efficient to recycle.
- 3 Recycling creates jobs and brings in a lot of money for families and the economy.

## LAST WEEK'S POLL

Last week, we asked if recess should be totally free time. You voted strongly in favor of getting to choose your activities: 89% of you said yes, and 11% said no.



## What do you think?

Now that you've read a bit more about this issue, visit [kids.theweekjunior.com/polls](https://kids.theweekjunior.com/polls) so you can vote in our debate. Vote **YES** if you think we should cut back on recycling or **NO** if you don't. We'll publish the results next week.

The goal of the big debate is to present two sides of an issue fairly in order to stimulate discussion and allow our readers to make up their minds. The views on this page do not reflect those of *The Week Junior*, and the page is not funded by third parties.