



## FACT SHEET

# USED TEXTILES: A VALUABLE RESOURCE

UPDATED MAY 2024

*Every year Massachusetts residents and businesses throw away about 230,000 tons of usable textiles, including clothing, footwear, belts, hats, handbags, throw rugs, drapes, towels, sheets, and other linens.<sup>1</sup> Ninety-five percent of this material can be reused as clothing, converted to wiping cloths, or recycled into new fiber-based products. In November 2022, Massachusetts banned textiles from waste disposal along with awarding grant funding to textile recovery operations to help combat this problem.*

### AN ECONOMIC RESOURCE:

- Massachusetts is home to more than 25 businesses, manufacturers, and non-profit organizations that sort, reuse, "upcycle", or convert used textiles into new products.
- Hundreds more businesses are involved in the resale of clothing, locally and overseas, where there's a growing demand for second-hand textiles.
- Used textile donations also support local charitable organizations that provide jobs and job training to Massachusetts residents.
- Keeping used textiles out of the trash reduces disposal costs for local government, businesses, and residents.

### ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS:

- Before the waste ban, an estimated 15% of used textiles (or about 40,000 tons) were recovered in Massachusetts; the other 85% going to landfills and municipal waste combustors.
- Cotton is the most pesticide-dependent crop in the world. It takes 1/3 of a pound of pesticides to make one t-shirt.<sup>2</sup>
- Production of synthetic (petroleum-based) fibers like polyester and nylon produces volatile organic compounds, nitrous oxide (a greenhouse gas), and consumes large amounts of water.<sup>3</sup>



### RULES FOR DONATING USED TEXTILES – NOT WHAT YOU'D THINK!

Contrary to popular belief, donations in any condition are welcomed by for-profit and non-profit textile collectors alike. This includes items with stains, rips, missing buttons, or broken zippers. Why? Textiles are a valuable commodity! Items that don't sell in a thrift store are baled and sold to overseas markets or can be recycled domestically. **The only UNACCEPTABLE donations are wet/moldy items or items contaminated with bodily fluids, oil, or hazardous substances.**

<sup>1</sup>Based on data from Municipal Waste Combustor Class II Recycling Program Waste Characterization Studies, 2022, available at <http://www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/massdep/recycle/reports/waste-reduction-and-recycling.html>

<sup>2</sup>Secondary Materials and Recycled Textiles Assn: <http://www.smartasn.org/consumers/index.cfm#>

<sup>3</sup>Secondary Materials and Recycled Textiles Assn: <http://www.smartasn.org/consumers/index.cfm#>

### What to donate (in any style, age, or condition, including stained and torn):

- Clothing: Shirts, pants, denim, jackets, coats, suits, dresses, hats, belts, ties, gloves, scarves, socks (even single ones), undergarments, pajamas, costumes, handbags, and backpacks.
- Footwear: Shoes, sandals, sneakers, cleats, boots, flip-flops, and slippers.
- Household textiles: Curtains, drapes, table linens, cloth napkins, sheets, blankets, comforters and other bedding, pillows, stuffed animals, and towels.

### WHAT HAPPENS TO MY DONATED TEXTILES?

- About 45% of donated textiles are sold as secondhand apparel, either through charitable organizations or for-profit exporters that sell baled clothing to developing countries.
  - Organizations such as [Goodwill](#) and [Salvation Army](#) operate retail stores where donated clothing and household items are sold. Clothing and textiles that don't sell are then baled and sold to textile brokers. Both activities generate revenue to support their core missions.
  - For-profit textile recyclers sort, grade, and bale textiles and sell them directly to export markets. Clothing exports from North America supply high quality product to local entrepreneurs abroad, such as in Africa, where 95% of the population wears used clothing.
- Another 30% of donated textiles are turned into industrial wiping cloths. [ERC Wiping Products](#) (Lynn, MA) and [Textile Waste Supply](#) (Charlestown, MA) cut used clothing and other textiles into rags and sell them to commercial garages and public works operations.
- The remaining 20% of donated textiles are sent to fiber converters like [Cyntex](#) (New Canaan, CT) where they are broken down into basic fiber components and rendered unrecognizable through their de-fabrication and de-manufacturing process. They are then remanufactured into shoddy material for insulation or carpeting or recycled into new garments.
- Companies like Boston-based [Project Repat](#) make custom quilts and blankets out of old t-shirts. These “upcycled” products are sewn at local factories in Woburn, Lawrence, and New Bedford that pay workers a fair and living wage.

### WHERE TO DONATE YOUR TEXTILES

- [Beyond the Bin](#) is an online directory used to find out how and where to donate or recycle items that can't go in your home recycling bin but are too good to trash. Enter your city or town and search for “clothing” to find the location closest to you to drop off unwanted clothing, shoes, and other textiles.
- RecyclingWorks in Massachusetts is a recycling assistance program that helps businesses and institutions reduce waste. Check out their [Find a Recycler](#) tool and search for “textiles” to find organizations that recover textiles for reuse or recycling.



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This information is available in alternate format by calling our ADA Coordinator at 617-621-2980

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