



SCRAP METAL

Scrap metal is a broad term encompassing both ferrous (iron and steel) and non-ferrous (aluminium, copper, zinc, tin, nickel, mercury and lead) metals that are disused. It includes everything from old batteries and vehicles to cast iron, electrical cable and aluminium. Some scrap metals can be used in their original form for building construction, or alternatively they can be melted down to create new metals. The main source of scrap metal is from industries, such as metal processing off-cuts and dismantling of industrial plants. The most significant metal recycled from domestic waste is aluminium, the majority of which is collected from drink cans and foil (different councils recycle different products though, so check before recycling).

Metals can be extremely toxic to the surrounding environment. Exposed metal waste, whether in landfill or not, breaks down over time and can be released into soil, forming metal salts. Metal salts can then be washed into waterways, affecting aquatic organisms and water quality. Thankfully, metals are ideal for recovery and recycling due to their chemical makeup and high market value.

Recovery and recycling contributes to significant savings in greenhouse gas emissions as opposed to the mining and processing of raw materials. It reduces the energy used in the refining process, as well as the quantity of waste produced as a by-product.

The infrastructure needed for collecting scrap metals is already well established and continues to grow. Scrap companies sort the metals, removing any non-metal waste, and grade the various materials before it is sold to a metal refinery. Scrap metals can be reused in their original form or melted down into new metals or materials. For example, silver oxide batteries are recycled for their silver content with some of the recovered silver sold on to the photographic industry for film manufacture. 'New' steel products now contain between 25-100% recycled steel, depending on the product. This means that when you buy steel you are helping to close the loop by ensuring scrap metal is cycled through industry by reusing and recycling, therefore encouraging the disposal of scrap metal to be made redundant.

WHAT CAN I DO?

- Keep household and industrial appliances in good condition - it prolongs their lifespan resulting in less metal waste entering the waste stream.
- Reuse metal items where you can. For example, buy motor vehicle parts from auto recyclers rather than buying new parts. Not only is it cheaper, but better for the environment as well.
- Clean your recyclable metals before recycling. The presence of contaminants means new metal must be used in remanufacturing to dilute the scrap.
- For large amounts of scrap metal, look for scrap metal merchants listed in the Yellow Pages. Some scrap metal merchants supply on site scrap metal bins for example at construction sites, while a fee is usually charged for picking up car bodies for scrap metal.

MORE INFORMATION

- www.scrap.org/ - The Institute of Scrap Recycling Industries' Scrap magazine covers a wide range of issues surrounding scrap metal
- www.smorgonsteel.com.au/recycling/ - benefits of scrap iron and steel recycling including case studies
- www.recyclingtoday.com/ - searching for 'scrap metal' from this site provides heaps of links to scrap metal industry websites as well as a range of articles.
- www.wasteonline.org.uk/resources/Wasteguide/mn_wastetypes_metals.html - a comprehensive site on metals recycling