

Clothes for the cause



Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What is Clothes for the Cause?

A: Clothes for the Cause is a for-profit company, whose mission is to partner with and empower non-profits to help them achieve their financial goals through textile recycling. CFTC pays non-profits by the pound for all the household textiles that they collect.

Q: What is textile recycling?

A: Textile recycling offers solutions to a seldom-discussed environmental issue: the waste involved in the disposal and manufacturing of clothing, shoes, blankets, drapes and other textiles. Clothes for the Cause aims to reduce this environmental burden by finding a second life for reusable materials and keeping millions of pounds of textiles out of landfills, while at the same time helping non-profits raise badly needed funds.

Q: What is the environmental burden of textile waste?

A: Statistics from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) indicate a significant impact on landfills:

- The average American throws away 82 pounds of textiles every year. In 2011, only 15.3 percent of textile waste was recycled.
- Textile waste occupies nearly 5 percent of all landfill space in the United States.
- The U.S. produced an average of 13.09 million tons of textile waste in 2011. Of this, 85 percent winds up as waste in landfills – that equals 11.09 million tons of post-consumer textile waste.

Throwing away clothes and other items – rather than recycling them – also supports the need to produce new materials, which leaves its mark on the environment.

- According to the World Bank, nearly 20 percent of global industrial water pollution comes from the dyeing and treatment of textiles.
- The EPA has highlighted carcinogenic effects of dyes and other chemicals used in the textile manufacturing process.

Q: Do textile recyclers make a difference?

A: According to the EPA, roughly 15 percent of all U.S. textile waste is recycled or donated – and companies such as Clothes for the Cause and others are working to increase that number. In just two years, Clothes for the Cause alone has diverted more than four million pounds of textiles from landfills in Idaho, Oregon and Washington.

Q: What happens to the recycled items?

A: Clothes for the Cause finds a second life for 98 percent of textiles it collects. Clothing and shoes in reusable condition go to U.S. thrift stores. Some items are used by disaster relief organizations. Materials that cannot be re-worn are shredded and re-woven into new textiles, turned into industrial rags, or repurposed as insulation, playground chips and other second-generation products. Typically, only material that is wet or moldy when dropped off cannot be reused.

Q: Why isn't textile recycling handled by municipalities, like aluminum or glass recycling?

A: Some communities and local governments have started local textile recycling efforts – a testament to the growing awareness and commitment to keeping these materials out of landfills. For example, New York City's re-fashionNYC has collected one million pounds of used clothing, according to the city's department of sanitation. The city of Tempe, Arizona has also joined the textile recycling effort, with its Slash the Trash program, focusing on finding a new life for old clothes.

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However, curb side recycling can present challenges for municipalities and traditional waste management companies. Textiles must be kept dry to be effectively recycled, and placing them curb side presents the possibility of getting wet through rain or snow. Mingling textiles with other recyclables also raise the risk of contamination. Additionally, some municipalities and landfill operators are turning to textile recycling companies for expertise in effectively managing textile waste. While some people are careful to donate or recycle unwanted clothing, others throw away bags of perfectly good items. Keeping textiles out of the waste stream is beneficial on numerous counts: in addition to filling landfills, textiles are notorious for clogging and damaging waste sorting machines.

Q: Does Clothes for the Cause give tax receipts?

A: No. CFTC is a for-profit company, we are buying the material for the church, school or team, therefore we cannot generate a receipt. The team, church or school that the individual gave the clothing to should issue the tax receipt as they are the non-profit benefitting from the event. All donors are advised to check with each charity on a case by case basis and/or their tax preparer.

Q: What do you do with what you Collect?

A: Unlike aluminum, where it doesn't matter if a can says Coke or Pepsi, textile recycling is very "Sort" intensive. We are looking to find the "Best use" for everything that we collect. If a garment is suitable to be "re-worn" it will go to a local thrift shop for "re-wear." If it isn't suitable for re-wear it goes to the "rag" market where it is turned into industrial polishing clothes or absorbency rags, depending on the blend of the fabric. If a garment is so badly worn that it cannot be used in this fashion, the final stop is "fiber conversion" where the fabric is broken down to its original state and looks something like a cotton ball. This material is used in stuffed animals, pet beds or upholstery. ZERO waste!

Q: What items aren't included in this program? Can you take my Spa/BBQ/trampoline cover?

A: No. Spa covers, BBQ covers, trampoline covers, pet beds, bed pillows, carpeting, mattresses, hotel linens, items previously for sale in a thrift store, books, hard toys, glass or breakables, electronics, cannot be taken.

Q: Why can't we take these through this program?

A: Quality – to give the generous pay back to the non-profit groups we cannot pay for these items.

Q: What 3rd world countries do your items go to and why?

A: Our goal is always to take clothes and shoes to local thrift stores. If they can't be sold there, then they could be exported to developing nations. These are countries where the indigenous methods of making clothing, i.e. weaving cloth, are no longer viable, but yet lacks the infrastructure to manufacture clothes in country due to instable political structure, poor roads, etc. They buy clothes in bulk in the second-hand market.

Q: Do you donate some of your good clothing to local charities and missions?

A: No, just the reverse! They work with us to get rid of clothes and shoes that they can't use through our sister company Gemtext Recycling. Many non-profits need money as much as they need clothes and shoes and we buy from them what they can't sell and recycle it and in turn give them badly needed funds.