

Recycling Benefits to the Everlasting Aluminum Can

Beverages packaged in aluminum cans are purchased by millions of consumers around the world each day. People pop the top, hear that familiar hiss and down their favorite drink.

Then what happens? Where do those cans go after they're tossed into the nearest recycling bin? It travels quite a bit before it's reincarnated as another can:

- First, two out of every three cans produced in the United States begin the recycling process either at local recycling centers, community drop-off sites, charity collection sites, reverse vending machines or curbside pick-up spots.
- Aluminum cans from these sources are then gathered at large, regional scrap processing companies. There, they are compressed into highly dense, 30-pound briquettes or 1,200-pound bales and shipped to aluminum companies for melting.
- At the aluminum companies, the condensed cans are shredded, crushed and stripped of their inside and outside dyes and decorations via a burning process. Then, the potato chip-sized pieces of aluminum are loaded into melting furnaces, where the recycled metal is blended with brand new aluminum.
- The molten aluminum is then poured into 25-foot long ingots weighing over 30,000 pounds. The ingots are fed into rolling mills that reduce the thickness of the metal from 20-plus inches into sheets that are about 1/100 of an inch thick.
- This metal is then coiled and shipped to can manufacturers, who produce can bodies and lids. The cans are then delivered to beverage companies for filling.
- The new cans, filled with your favorite beverages, are then returned to store shelves in as little as 60 days ... and the recycling process begins again!

Why should you recycle aluminum? Because it saves energy, helps the environment and our economy, and benefits your community. Consider these factors:

Helping the Economy: The aluminum can is the most valuable container to recycle and is the most recycled consumer product in the U.S. today. Aluminum has a high market value and continues to provide an economic incentive to recycle it. Locally, when aluminum cans are recycled curbside, they help pay for community services. Each year, the aluminum industry pays out more than \$800 million dollars for empty aluminum cans. That's a lot of money that can go to civic and charitable organizations, local schools and other good causes.

Saving Energy: For each pound of metal recycled, the aluminum industry saves the energy resources needed to generate about 7.5 kilowatt-hours of electricity. In 2005, 51.4 billion cans, or 1.5 billion pounds of aluminum was recycled. That's enough energy to meet the electric needs of a city the size of Pittsburgh, PA, for six years!

Helping the Environment: To produce aluminum cans, bauxite ore is extracted from the ground, transported and processed. This requires large amounts of energy – the equivalent of some 1,740 gallons of gasoline for every ton of aluminum. When gasoline or other fuels are burned, carbon dioxide, the most common greenhouse gas, and other emissions are released into

the atmosphere. In contrast, making one ton of aluminum from *recycled* material uses the equivalent of 90 gallons of gasoline. That's an obvious win for the environment.

Benefiting Your Community: Aluminum can recycling enables charitable organizations and groups to earn funds for local projects. The money earned enhances programs and communities that improve the quality of people's lives. From a local can drive to raise money for school improvements, to a Boy or Girl Scout troop's "Cans Into Cash" competition to pay for camp, recycling is used all over the country to help others.

Another example of this is the "Cans for Habitat" program. Through a national partnership between the Aluminum Association and Habitat for Humanity International, aluminum cans are recycled via a network of drop-off locations to raise money for Habitat for Humanity to build affordable housing for low-income families.

Just by recycling a can once destined for the landfill or incinerator, we're keeping our local environment clean, providing a needed resource for aluminum recycling businesses, and helping provide funds for needed civic and charitable causes. It's a win-win for the individual, community, business, and the environment.

