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How to Recycle and Upcycle Waste from Home Renovation Projects

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If you've ever watched one of the many home renovation shows on television, then you're familiar with one of the most exciting aspects of those programs – the moment when the sledge hammers come out to demolish the area to be renovated. There's clearly something very therapeutic about this process as it is the first physical step in a significant house project.

Sometimes the cameras even show the destroyed pieces being tossed into a large dumpster outside the home. What they never show, however, is what happens to that construction waste from there. The United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimated that 2008 alone saw 136 million tons of construction waste, accounting for at least a third of the solid waste stream. Besides taking up precious landfill space, the [home renovation materials](#) could also contain chemicals that pollute soil and water. But there are proactive waste diversion actions you can take to make your trash someone else's treasure.

How to Participate in Home Renovation Waste Diversion

As tempting as it may be to destroy the materials you're going to replace, force yourself to carefully dismantle items in the project area so that others can make use of them. To understand the value this creates socially, environmentally and financially, check out the [Benefits of Deconstruction](#).^[i]

Additionally, you should definitely consider reusing building materials from your own home rather than buying new. Sure, you want your renovation project to be *new*, but is there any reason to *not* try and reuse some of the old materials? You can also try to work around some items.^[ii]

But of course, if you'd rather not reuse yourself, be sure to donate to nonprofit construction waste reuse organizations rather than sending that stuff to the landfill. There are a surprising number of organizations springing up in communities all over the nation that help with home renovation waste diversion. A great North America-wide option are the Habitat for Humanity [ReStores](#) which take donations of materials they can use. Other regional examples include [Construction Junction](#) in Pittsburgh, PA, [The Stock Pile](#) in Canton, OH and the [Rebuilding Exchange](#) in Chicago, IL. Conduct searches using Google to see what's available in your area.

Finally, when all else fails, try to connect with a construction waste database to find a taker for your used building materials. The Whole Building Design Guide website can help you connect to companies that help with hauling, collecting and processing recyclable construction waste through its [Construction Waste Management Database](#).

Home Renovation Waste Diversion: How to Upcycled Different Types of Materials

- **Cabinetry:** You may be so done with those ugly kitchen cabinets that you just want them to go away, but someone else may love them, so remove them carefully.
- **Wood:** Make sure wood for reuse is free of nails, paint, staples or anything that might get in the way of using it elsewhere.
- **Drywall:** Removing old drywall for reuse is tricky, but when you're installing the new, be sure to protect unused pieces that others can use in their

projects.

- **Metal:** Scrap metal may come from siding, metal studs and other sources. Check with your local scrap metal dealers and you may even get some cash for it.
- **Cardboard:** Many of the materials you use in your renovation project will come in corrugated cardboard, which is highly recyclable either through your curbside pickup or local municipal waste facility.
- **Insulation:** Take removed insulation and use it to beef up your attic insulation or find a local salvage group that will take it for others to use.
- **Appliances:** These can generate cash for you at local scrap dealers, or you can generate some goodwill by donating them to local charities that will take care of the scrapping for you (and keep the proceeds as a donation).
- **Chemicals:** At the end of your project, there's bound to be any number of products in the form of paints, sealants and other solvents, all of which may be considered hazardous waste depending on what's in them. Be sure to check with your local municipal waste facility for proper disposal options.

More Resources for Home Renovation Waste Diversion

- Ontario's Ministry of the Environment has a great booklet you can download called [What to do with Home Renovation Waste?](#) Also be sure to check out The Environmentally Responsible Construction and Renovation Handbook's [Chapter 8: Construction, Renovation and Demolition Waste](#).
- The Whole Building Design Guide has an extensive [Construction Waste Management](#) web page with lots of guidance.
- Learn the finer points from [Deconstruction Green Points, and You](#), a downloadable publication from Boulder, Colorado, a city with one of the most progressive policies regarding home building projects and construction waste.
- The State of California also has an extensive page of information on [Construction and Demolition Debris Recycling](#) that includes a series of videos on best practices in construction waste reduction.
- The go-to guide for how to handle home renovation waste diversion is the [Deconstruction Guidebook](#) from the Deconstruction Institute.

Image via Flickr: [mrlaugh](#)

[i] Benefits of Deconstruction, from Second Chance, Inc. Retrieved from http://www.secondchanceinc.org/index.aspx?u=Benefits_of_Deconstruction

[ii] How do I Dispose of my Construction Waste without Bruising my Environmental Conscience? By Emillie Sennebogen, HowStuffWorks. Retrieved from <http://home.howstuffworks.com/home-improvement/construction/materials/green-construction-waste-removal3.htm>



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