

The Sensible Environmentalist

Reducing Solid Wood in Landfills

(NAPSA)—**DEAR DR. MOORE:**

My local recycling program accepts paper, plastics, metal—everything, it seems, except wood. Does anyone recycle wood?



Dr. Moore

Actually, most major cities have wood recycling capability, though it isn't usually part of Blue Box or other home pickup programs. Still, given the many uses for recovered wood, far too

much ends up in landfills.

As individuals, we have a role to play, starting with prevention. For example, proper maintenance can eliminate the need to replace wood siding, window frames and doors by keeping them strong and weather resistant. You can also minimize waste from building projects by using common lumber dimensions—or by saving leftover wood for other uses, donating it to a high school wood shop or bringing it to a wood recycling facility. (For facilities nearby, see the National Wood Recycling Directory at www.afandpa.org.)

Solid wood recycling has many environmental benefits. In addition to reducing pressure on landfills, it extends the life of harvested timber and is yet another weapon in the fight against global warming. As trees grow, they absorb carbon dioxide—a greenhouse gas thought to be a major cause of climate change. The carbon is stored until the wood burns

or decays, thus keeping it out of the atmosphere.

Given that an estimated 235,000 U.S. homes are destroyed or converted every year, the construction/demolition industry generates a lot of wood waste. However, there's an encouraging trend toward the "deconstruction" of old buildings instead of the usual knock-it-down approach. The aim is to salvage lumber, doors and other products so they can be used again. There are downsides, such as labor costs, but these can often be overcome, especially since many structures now being torn down were built using extremely high quality timber.

If possible, the best option is to re-use the wood to create other valuable products—turning wall panels into flooring, for example. If the quality isn't great, the next best thing may be to chip the wood for particleboard or other composite products. Beyond that, wood can be mulched for landscaping or animal bedding, even burned for energy.

The point is that the life cycle for wood shouldn't end after its initial use. As sensible environmentalists, we have the opportunity—and responsibility—to make better use of our forest resources through recycling.

Dr. Patrick Moore has been a leader of the environmental movement for more than 30 years. A co-founder of Greenpeace, he holds a PhD in ecology and a BSc in forest biology. Questions can be sent to Patrick@SensibleEnvironmental.com.