



Sustainability and Recycling

Happy New Year, Helena! Let's Resolve to Reduce Waste and Recycle!

As we kick off 2025 and make our New Year's resolutions, let's consider making positive changes for a more sustainable Helena. Even small actions can add up to a big impact. While we encourage recycling the waste we *do* generate, another way to make a real difference is by reducing waste. The EPA tells us that a whopping 42% of greenhouse gas emissions come from producing and consuming goods—meaning what we throw away has a significant impact on our climate.

While recycling and composting are important, the most effective way to reduce waste is to simply use less in the first place. As stated in the City of Helena Strategic Plan for Waste Reduction,

"The materials we manage downstream (recycle, compost, trash) represent only a fraction of the impacts caused upstream by extracting raw materials, manufacturing products, and distributing goods. Recycling or composting one ton of material in Helena avoids one ton of landfill waste locally. However, reducing one ton of materials used in Helena prevents a staggering 71 tons of waste across the entire production chain."

This year, let's focus on reducing, reusing, and rethinking our consumption habits. Here are a few simple, no-cost ways to get started right away:



Skip Single-Use Disposables: This is an easy and quick change. Say "no thanks" to disposable straws, plastic cutlery, and extra napkins when ordering takeout or dining in. Keep a set of reusable utensils in your bag or car for easy access.



Use Up What You Have: Before heading to the store, check your fridge and pantry. Get creative with leftovers and use up older items first. This simple practice reduces food waste and saves money.



While our overarching goal remains waste reduction, waste generation is still a reality. Therefore in 2025, let's commit to maximizing our recycling efforts. Beginning with this newsletter, we are going to feature the Greater Helena area's monthly recycling performance, starting with November 2024. Let's use this data as a benchmark and strive to exceed those numbers this year.

| | Nov. 2023 (in tons) | Nov. 2024 (in tons) |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| Aluminum/Tin/ Glass/Plastics | 29.12 | 25.78 |
| Paper | 13.4 | 12.4 |
| E-Waste | 1.9 | 2.2 |
| Scrap Metal | 58.6 | 159.9 |
| Cardboard | 67.4 | 71.6 |
| Auto Batteries | 1.1 | 1.5 |
| Lithium Batteries | 0 | 0 |
| Oil/Antifreeze | 0 | 7.29 |
| Grass/Leaves/ Wood Chips/ Bio-Solids/ X-mas Trees/Food | 561.9 | 515.1 |



Plan Your Meals and Shop Smart: Planning your meals and shopping with a list helps prevent impulse buys and food spoilage, a major source of household waste. Knowing what you need helps you avoid buying excess groceries that might end up in the trash.



Repurpose Containers: Instead of immediately throwing away jars, bottles, or plastic containers, clean them and find new uses for them. Glass jars can become storage for dry goods, and plastic containers can organize items around your home.



Borrow or Share: Instead of buying tools, books, or other items you'll only use occasionally, consider borrowing them from a friend, neighbor, or the library. This reduces the overall demand for new products and minimizes waste.



Remember Your Reusable Bags: The biggest challenge with reusable bags is remembering to bring them! Keep them in your car or by the door so you grab them on your way out. If you forget them, simply carry your items out without a bag or ask for a box if available. This avoids accumulating more plastic bags and reinforces the habit for next time. Plus, reusable bags are often larger than plastic ones, meaning fewer trips to and from the car when unloading your groceries.

Expanded Lithium Battery Recycling Program in Helena

As we welcome the New Year and reflect on our holiday waste, we want to remind folks that in 2024, the City of Helena took a significant step in expanding its lithium battery recycling program. Lithium batteries, commonly found in electronics, tools, and appliances, pose a serious fire hazard when improperly disposed of. In the past, these batteries have caused fires at the Lewis and Clark County landfill, resulting in costly damages.

To address this issue, the City has implemented several measures, including additional recycling bins at the Transfer Station and a partnership with Call to Recycle for safe battery shipment.

This initiative is a positive move for our environment and community.

The City encourages residents to take advantage of this expanded program. Remember, lithium batteries should never be thrown in the trash. Please bring them to the designated recycling areas at the Transfer Station.





Let's Drive Change: Reducing Our Vehicle Impact Together

We recognize that Montana is a large state, and driving is often a necessity for work, errands, and connecting with other communities. However, even with the need to drive, we can make mindful choices about our transportation habits to reduce our environmental impact. By making a few simple changes, we can collectively reduce our carbon footprint and contribute to cleaner air.

Here are some practical tips to consider as you look for ways to be more environmentally friendly in 2025:

Reduce Idling in Winter: Idling in cold weather is tempting to warm up your vehicle or keep it warm, but it wastes fuel and increases emissions. Even short periods of idling can significantly contribute to air pollution. If you are going inside for more than one minute, turn off your engine.

Embrace Alternative Transportation: Whenever possible, choose alternatives to driving. Walking, biking, and utilizing public transportation are excellent ways to reduce emissions and get some exercise.

Combine Errands & Plan Routes: By carefully planning your trips and combining multiple errands into a single outing, you not only minimize cold starts (which are less fuel-efficient and produce more emissions) but also reduce the overall distance traveled.

Practice Smooth Driving: Aggressive driving habits, such as rapid acceleration and hard braking, waste fuel and increase emissions. Smooth acceleration, consistent speeds, and gentle braking improve fuel efficiency and reduce wear and tear on your vehicle.

Maintain Your Vehicle: Regular vehicle maintenance, including keeping tires properly inflated and ensuring timely oil changes, optimizes fuel efficiency and reduces emissions. Properly inflated tires improve gas mileage and extend tire life.

Carpool When Possible: Sharing rides with friends, family, or colleagues is a great way to reduce the number of vehicles on the road. Consider carpooling to work, school, or community events, especially if you live in the Helena Valley or neighboring communities.