

Eco-Friendly Relocation

by Nick Gromicko, CMI® and Kate Tarasenko

Relocation is often stressful and time-consuming, but rarely do we wonder about the impact the process has on the environment. This is amplified when moving to a smaller house or condominium, and additional decisions have to be made regarding items that must be discarded in order to save space. If we don't make these decisions deliberately, our choices can generate a lot of trash, and waste energy and natural resources. Fortunately, we have other options so that, when the time comes, we can relocate -- along with our stuff -- responsibly.

Some measures to consider before moving day:

- Buy less. The less you accumulate, the less you will have to discard when it comes time to relocate. Also, fight the urge to be a pack rat by recycling and giving items away as they become obsolete to you. If you put off these decisions until the day you have to relocate, many of the things that you're on the fence about keeping will likely end up in the trash because you'll be too preoccupied by the move to put the effort into thoughtful and responsible disposal.
- Discard items in a responsible manner, rather than merely throwing them away. Non-biodegradable trash doesn't disappear; it just accumulates in new locations where it contaminates groundwater and soil, off-gasses methane and other greenhouse gases, and overwhelms otherwise useful land. By taking a few extra steps, you can save money, help others, and minimize your impact on the environment.



Sort through your belongings and decide what you don't want to take with you, separating them into defined groups based on how best to dispose of them. For instance, separate your unwanted items that are in good working order, and can be reused by a friend or neighbor, from other items that require special disposal, such as hazardous chemicals or large, bulky items. See the following sections on how to identify items for reuse, recycling and special disposal.

- Recycle. With a minimum of effort, you can recycle old magazines and newspapers that you do not want to take with you to your new home. Glass, metal and plastics are also easily recyclable, and you will conserve some of the raw materials and energy required to produce these items by re-offering them. Many of the items you clean out from your home might be recyclable in your community curbside or drop-off recycling program. To determine what items you can recycle, contact your local environmental agency or waste-pickup service.

Common recyclables include:

- cardboard;
- mixed paper;

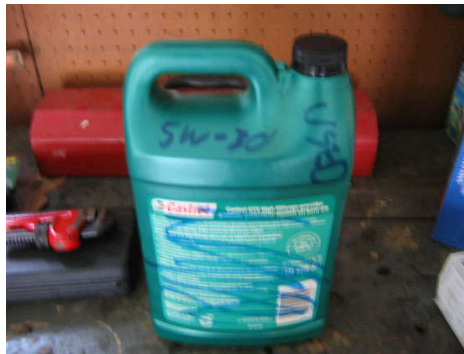
- newspapers;
- glass bottles and jars;
- plastic bottles and jugs; and
- scrap aluminum and cans.



Many items can be dropped off for recycling at nearby locations, such as:

- plastic grocery bags that are often accepted for recycling at grocery stores;
- used electronics, such as cell phones and computers, which are collected for recycling at electronics stores, school vocational programs, and by municipal governments;
- bulky consumer goods. Your municipality, by special request or at designated times of the year, may collect appliances and other large discards, such as non-working refrigerators and broken furniture.
- Sell.
 - Neighborhood yard sales are a fun way to get rid of items and make a little extra money.
 - Websites such as eBay, Craigslist and Freecycle provide ways to advertise online, often for free, in order to unload unwanted items.
 - Antiques can be cleaned and sold to antique and consignment shops.
- Donate. Try putting items on your curb with a “free” sign. Or, take them to your local Salvation Army Store, ARC Store, DAV Store, Goodwill, women's shelter and homeless shelter as the items lose their usefulness to you. Keep a spare bag in the trunk of your vehicle, and take the reusable items that you run across out to your car. Before you know it, you will have a full bag to drop off at a thrift store or a collection drive. Charitable donations to many non-profit organizations are often tax-deductible. Popular donated items include:
 - clothing and footwear;
 - bedding, curtains and towels;
 - some toiletries;
 - books and magazines, which can be donated to your local school, library, or community or senior center;
 - furniture;
 - kitchenware and small, working appliances;
 - consumer electronics;
 - unwanted entertainment items, such as CDs, DVDs and video games;
 - larger items, such as computers, and stoves and refrigerators;
 - vehicles; and
 - unopened food items, which will be accepted at food banks and shelters.
- Hire an environmentally conscious moving company. When searching for a professional service, select a competent expert who is concerned about nature and takes active steps in employing environmentally sound practices. Ask the company:

- Do they encourage the use of used boxes rather than insisting that each customer pay for new boxes? An environmentally conscious transporter should be happy to take the materials from you after your move to pass on to his or her next customer.
- Are their vehicles fuel-efficient? Ethanol-powered trucks are a bonus, although high mile-per-gallon diesel and gasoline trucks are positive choices, too.
- Moving vehicles may also be fitted with devices that emit a sound to prevent animals from wandering into the road. It may seem trivial, but moving vehicles spend a long time on the road, and these devices can and do save the lives of many animals. In Australia, they use “hopper stoppers” to protect kangaroos. In much of the rest of the world, deer are a bigger problem.
- If you don't use a professional moving company, be smart about boxes and packing materials. Rather than buying these items new, which unnecessarily adds to the expense of moving, find them used. In most cases, old boxes work just as well as new boxes. Liquor stores, grocery stores, hardware and other retail stores are usually happy to give away large cardboard boxes they no longer need and would have to otherwise discard or recycle. Calling around first will save you frustration and the emissions of driving around town to individual stores. You can also ask friends and neighbors if they have materials you can have or borrow. Moving boxes are also popular “freebies” on Craigslist. By following this tip, you will have reduced the number of trees that must be chopped down and boxes that must be manufactured. Also, by reusing boxes and packing material, you keep them out of landfills. When you are finished moving, keep the packing materials for future use, or pass them on.
- Properly dispose of hazardous household items. While cleaning out and packing up the basement, garage or shed, you might run across some products such as cleaners, pesticides and paints, which are corrosive, flammable or otherwise dangerous to the environment and human health, if not disposed of properly. See if your community has special drop-off sites or holds periodic collection days for safe recycling and disposal of these products. Some stores offer free recycling for returned used goods at the point-of-purchase.



Common hazardous substances include:

- cleaning supplies;
- art and photographic supplies;
- spent printer cartridges;
- leftover paints, stains and varnishes;
- light bulbs and fluorescent tubes;
- spent batteries for laptops, digital cameras and other personal electronics;
- old car batteries;
- antifreeze;
- used motor oil; and
- pesticides and weed killer.

Also, beware of hazardous chemicals that may contain gasoline, oil or other toxins. Local environmental agencies across the country have set up programs for homeowners to trade in their old gasoline-powered lawnmowers and electric gardening equipment. Contact your local solid waste collection outfit or environmental agency to inquire about these programs. In summary, relocation is often hectic and expensive, but it doesn't have to damage the environment. You can also take easy steps to pare down your material belongings and keep them out of the landfill by reducing, reusing and recycling.