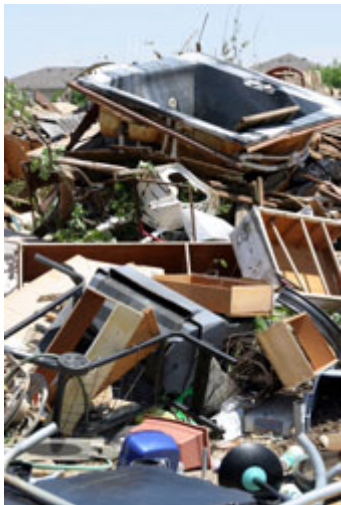




Freecycle...it's free!



Central Floridians generate mounds of waste. The Orange County landfill alone grows by 3,100 tons of refuse daily. Managing solid waste is a daunting and often controversial endeavor.

But through a movement known as "freecycle", residents can pass along unwanted items to others rather than to the landfill. It is the old hand-me-down system, but with the foremost goal of environmental stewardship.

"It's extremely rewarding to know that we are responsible for keeping thousands of tons of useful stuff out of the dump!" said Sally Harper, Orlando Freecycle leader. "It really makes me feel good to know we're making such a positive impact on the environment!"

How it works

A listserv, most often a Yahoo Group, is created for participants to join. Users post items offered or wanted for free, and those posts are distributed to the subscribers. It is that simple.

The Freecycle Network maintains a website to promote the movement and to help users find a networked community in their area. Each individual community maintains its subscriber list and moderates posts. This task falls to a volunteer moderator who works diligently to ensure that the group is not abused by spammers or frauds.

Florida Freecycle groups

If your area is not listed here, check [The Freecycle Network website](#), because new groups are added often. [Contact us](#) and let us know of your Freecycle group.

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How it began

There is much debate about who first coined the term freecycle, but there is little debate about who popularized it: The Freecycle Network. The non-profit organization initially was founded in May 2003 to promote waste reduction in downtown Tucson, Ariz. The network grew to include other groups who likewise wanted to stop their beloved landscapes from becoming one big landfill.

While independent organizations have spawned, The Freecycle Network remains the most expansive and visible promoter of the movement. Today, The Freecycle Network includes 4,021 communities worldwide and boasts 3.4 million registered users. Florida has 124 freecycle communities in the network, to date.

How well it works

Typically offered items include major appliances, furniture, computers, gently-worn clothing, toys, plants, and everything in between. Working and non-working items are offered or requested.

"I have offered everything from coupons I know that I won't use to surplus grapefruit off my tree, to uniforms and packing materials that I literally rescued from the dumpster at work." said Harper.

Charity thrift shops remain worthy recipients of donations. However, many thrift shops, particularly the big named ones, have become quite picky about what they accept. Many items deemed unsatisfactory or beyond the thrift shop's available space are discarded into dumpsters. Exploiting the adage that "one man's trash is another man's treasure," freecycle participants consider the potential of everything. Freecycle is a perfect place to offer those items that thrift shops likely would not accept: leftover building materials, ceramic tiles, plant cuttings.

"I've also received several items from generous members: most recently some quilting fabric to add to my stash and several broken dishes to use for mosaic projects," added Harper.

The community also provides a great opportunity for requesting materials for school projects.

"One subscriber on my list requested soup labels and cereal box tops, which schools can redeem to manufacturers," said Jaquelyn Crouch, a Brevard County participant. "I had been collecting those things for quite some time, not knowing anyone who redeemed them. The recipient even sent me a lovely hand-written thank you card. That's the kind of community freecycle is."

How to play nicely

The only hard-and-fast rules are that items must be given and accepted for free, and not be resold. Members are expected to be considerate of gifters and giftees, and to communicate with each other about pickup and

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delivery details. No-shows are not well tolerated.

Even though participants do receive good stuff free, they are united worldwide by a common goal: to make the Earth a more livable place for all. That is what differentiates freecycle as a movement. A key tenet of environmental stewardship is **reduce, reuse, recycle**, in that order. The responsibility starts with the individual. The responsibility starts with you.



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