

King County Hosts Mattress Recycling Summit

By Alex Erzen, King County Solid Waste Division, [LinkUp Mattress Project Manager](#), alex.erzen@kingcounty.gov

Approximately 11,000 mattresses weighing 400 tons were disposed of at the Cedar Hills Regional Landfill in 2010. One mattress can take up approximately 20 to 40 cubic feet of space. Among the typical recyclable materials contained in a mattress are steel, foam, cotton, wood and other fibers and fabrics.

In 2011, Correctional Industries recycled more than 700 tons of steel, 120 tons of foam, and 750 tons of wood, from more than 40,000 Western Washington mattresses. St. Vincent de Paul enterprise DR3, of Oakland, Calif., recycles about 120,000 mattresses annually from the San Francisco Bay Area. And in British Columbia, in the one year since Metro Vancouver banned mattress disposal, three businesses recycled more than 125,000 mattresses, saving an estimated two to three months of landfill space.

In December, King County Solid Waste Division hosted a Mattress Recycling Summit in Kent that brought together businesses, nonprofits, and public agencies to discuss how to make mattress recycling more available and convenient. More than 50 people attended, including three mattress recyclers: Correctional Industries, St. Vincent de Paul of Lane County, Ore., and [MattressRecycling.ca](#) of Vancouver, B.C. King County presented the idea of using the [Take it Back Network](#) system of

collection and recycling as a model for mattresses. Participants discussed the cost, storage and transportation challenges of mattresses and heard from the recyclers' experiences.

According to one mattress retailer, "90% of my customers want their mattress to be recycled," and would not have a problem paying a small fee. Another retailer noted, "Until there is a higher mattress disposal fee at transfer stations, mattresses will continue to be taken there instead of being recycled." Another recycler pointed out that "It is important that solid waste agencies coordinate amongst themselves. Mattresses will go where it is cheapest."

King County is currently expanding the Take it Back Network to include mattress recycling locations. The continuing success of electronics and fluorescent lamp Take it Back Network member sites proves solutions can be found by working with retail and recycling businesses.

In Connecticut, due to the difficulty of handling mattresses, including the expense of damaged equipment, the Connecticut Resource Recovery Authority imposed a per piece charge on mattress disposal. In 2011, local governments in Connecticut spent \$1.2 million to dispose of approximately 400,000 mattresses, mostly through incineration. The expense and volume of mattresses led [Connecticut](#) and the [Product Stewardship Institute](#) to seek a solution with the mattress industry in

a series of meetings and conference calls. Now, the Connecticut legislature is considering a bill that would require mattress manufacturers to create and finance a mattress stewardship program, so that mattresses are recycled and municipalities are relieved of the cost of mattress disposal. Rhode Island is also considering mattress stewardship legislation. Notes and presentations from the Dec. 7 summit, as well as more mattress information, can be viewed on the [King County LinkUp Mattress webpage](#). King County LinkUp is working to increase mattress recycling's convenience and availability: to join the conversation or get more information, please contact [Alex Erzen](#) at 206-296-4352.

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Jack Bradbury looks forward to meeting each of you.

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