

# Follow These Simple Rules When You Want to Recycle Your Bike

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When you look at your bike as a whole, there are several different materials that go into your ride.

Of course, there's the frame, which could be one metal, a mix of metals, or carbon fiber. Then, there are potentially different metals that make up chainrings, cogs, shifters, seatposts and other pieces. Wheels could be composite or a singular material, and saddles could be anything from a soft, petroleum-based textile to leather.

“It's resource- and carbon-intensive to put bikes out into the world, so we need to do anything we can to cut down the greenhouse gasses put out by these products” says Nate Pelczar, an avid cyclist and special projects manager at the California Product Stewardship Council, an environmental nonprofit working with private and public entities to find better end-of-life solutions for all kinds of consumer products.

Unfortunately, bikes and bike parts can often end up in landfills as a result of poor local infrastructure that *could* be giving the rides a second life or finding suitable recycling options. While systems are still developing in most urban areas to adequately take care of bikes that are no longer wanted, a little bit of research can help at least some parts responsibly make their way through the product waste cycle.

## **Always, Always Try to Find a Second life for the Bike**

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Whether you've outgrown your ride, decided to upgrade, or simply don't need it anymore, the first and best option is to find someone else to enjoy your bike. (And hey, the used bike market is still booming. Why not get something out of your previous-favorite bike if there's still some life to it for somebody else who wants it?)

There are a number of bike-specific thrift and donation shops across the country—i.e. Goodwill—that will take your bike, no matter the shape, and pull parts to either help put together a new bike or finish some other project. A quick Google search—try something like “bike donation near me”—will help locate one near you.

“The goal from our perspective is to always try to find a way to reuse the product first,” Pelczar says.

As with most products, the more times something is used, the less physical footprint it has over time, also reducing its carbon emissions. It's also a nice way to help someone find the joys of cycling who may not have access to a safe bike or isn't able to purchase one. If you're at a loss on where to get started with a donation or reselling option in your community, you can always ask your local bike shop or other members of your cycling community.

## **It's Time to Disassemble**

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When thinking about recycling your bike, you'll need to take it apart or take it to someone who knows how to separate what's potentially recyclable from what isn't.

The most common types of bikes destined for the trash pile are economy units sold mostly at big-box stores, typically full of cheap parts that don't have a long lifespan.

While that's a separate conversation, it's still possible to potentially recycle some of the plastic and lower-grade metals used. It's best to check with your local waste hauler to get an idea of what they'll take. You'd be surprised at how much can actually be recycled at commercial facilities well beyond what we see curbside.

## **Recycling Rubber**

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Depending on the composition of the bike tires, rubber is fairly recyclable. In some cases, even donation-based arts and crafts charities will take them and put them to use in other, non-bike ways.

As the desire for products with more recycled materials increases, using repurposed rubber is one way companies are trying to meet that demand.

The same goes for tubes. There are plenty of ways to reuse tubes rather than simply throwing them out.

## **A Note About Carbon Fiber**

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Although carbon fiber is an exceptional material for bike components, it's incredibly difficult to recycle. (Though there are some newer thermoplastic technologies that could be helping this.)

Currently, there isn't a scalable technology to separate all of the individual materials incorporated into carbon fiber, and oftentimes, there's significant waste during the production process of something made with carbon fiber.

The recycling options that do exist are energy- and labor-intensive and often have offgassing consequences. Pelczar also notes that grinding carbon fiber puts a dangerous dust in the air for those doing the work.

It's hard to argue with the sleek look and performance of carbon fiber, but for a good number of riders, a quality metal-framed bike, whether alloy or steel, is a very suitable option with a much lower footprint.

Above all, bicycle companies and other entities have a long way to go to closing the loop of bike production, but without a doubt, the best option remains to keep existing bikes riding as long as possible.