

Globe South

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PAT GREENHOUSE/GLOBE STAFF

Bay State Textiles employee Steven Hansen picks up clothing left in the company's drop box at the Academy Avenue School in Weymouth.

MONEY IN OLD CLOTHES

Communities, charities find profit in recycling textiles, regardless of condition (almost)

15%

Textiles that are currently recycled

USAGE: They become used apparel, or are cut into wiping cloths, or ground into fibers and made into such materials as carpet padding, insulation, and stuffing for toys and pillows.

95%

Used textiles that can be reused or repurposed



By Johanna Seltz
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

WEYMOUTH — Forget the idea that gently worn clothes are the only donations worth giving to organizations like the Salvation Army or Goodwill. Officials are putting out the word that torn pants, sweat-stained shirts, even singleton shoes, are welcome in the recycling world.

The only used textiles that can't be reused, they say, are those that are wet, mildewed, or loaded with hazardous waste. And the useful items include not only clothing, but also one-eared stuffed animals, faded curtains, and ratty towels and sheets.

"There's a perception that you don't give away stuff that's lousy; that it's not charity, it's dumping. And that perception is false," said Joseph Ferson, spokesman for the state Department of Environmental Protection.

Recyclers "will take the good, the bad, and the ugly," said Brooke Nash, branch chief for the agency's municipal recycling

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230,000

Tons of textiles that end up in Mass. landfills or incinerators annually. Average cost to communities: **\$65 a ton**

70

Pounds of textiles Americans throw away each year, per capita

5%

Solid waste in the state made up of textiles

Communities with textile recycling programs:

- ▶ At public schools: Quincy and Weymouth
- ▶ At recycling areas: Abington, Carver, Cohasset, Duxbury, Hanson, Hingham, Marshfield, Plymouth, Quincy, Scituate,

Weymouth, and Whitman



10,861 tons

Used textiles — clothing, shoes, belts, handbags, sheets, towels, stuffed animals, hats, and cushions — collected in 2011 by Morgan Memorial Goodwill Industries from **543,000 donors** in Eastern Massachusetts

SOURCES: Mass. Dept. of Environmental Protection, Secondary Materials and Recycled Textiles Association, Morgan Memorial Goodwill Industries, Bay State Textiles



Finding money in recycled fabrics

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program. "They'll take everything."

The new message is part of a state campaign to encourage people to recycle their old textiles the same way they now recycle their paper, cans, bottles, and glass, Nash said.

Weymouth is one of the communities that has taken the new approach to heart; it set up textile recycling bins at all of the town's public schools this spring and collected 33,825 pounds in April alone, according to Betsy Harris, the community relations liaison for the Weymouth school district.

The schools are paid \$100 per ton by a recycling company, Bay State Textiles of Pembroke, which picks up the materials three times a week, Harris said. And the town saves money by not having to pay for disposing of material that otherwise probably would have been thrown away, she said.

"We want to stress that the program is ongoing," she said, and that anyone can drop off textiles in the bin at any of the schools.

Weymouth began its textile recycling with a contest among the schools, as did Quincy. Abington plans a similar approach when schools reopen in the fall, said the town's health agent, Sharon White.

In addition, Bay State Textiles has collection trailers at municipal recycling areas in Abington, Carver, Cohasset, Duxbury, Hanson, Hingham, Marshfield, Plymouth, Quincy, Scituate, Weymouth, and Whitman, according to company founder Paul A. Curry.

The state became interested in textile recycling after a study of municipal waste last year found that textiles made up close to 5 percent of what was sent to landfills and incinerators in Massachusetts, Nash said, or about 230,000 tons a year.

After meeting with Curry and others involved with textile recycling last fall, and learning that only 15 percent of used textiles were being recycled, Nash said, it became obvious that more could be done.

"That's a lot of material, it's easy to handle, and there's a very mature collection infrastructure in the state," she said. "You've got charities, drop boxes, private businesses, all engaged in collecting the material and they want more of it."

"We just need to close the gap of awareness as to what is a recyclable textile, and that's what our efforts are all about," she added.

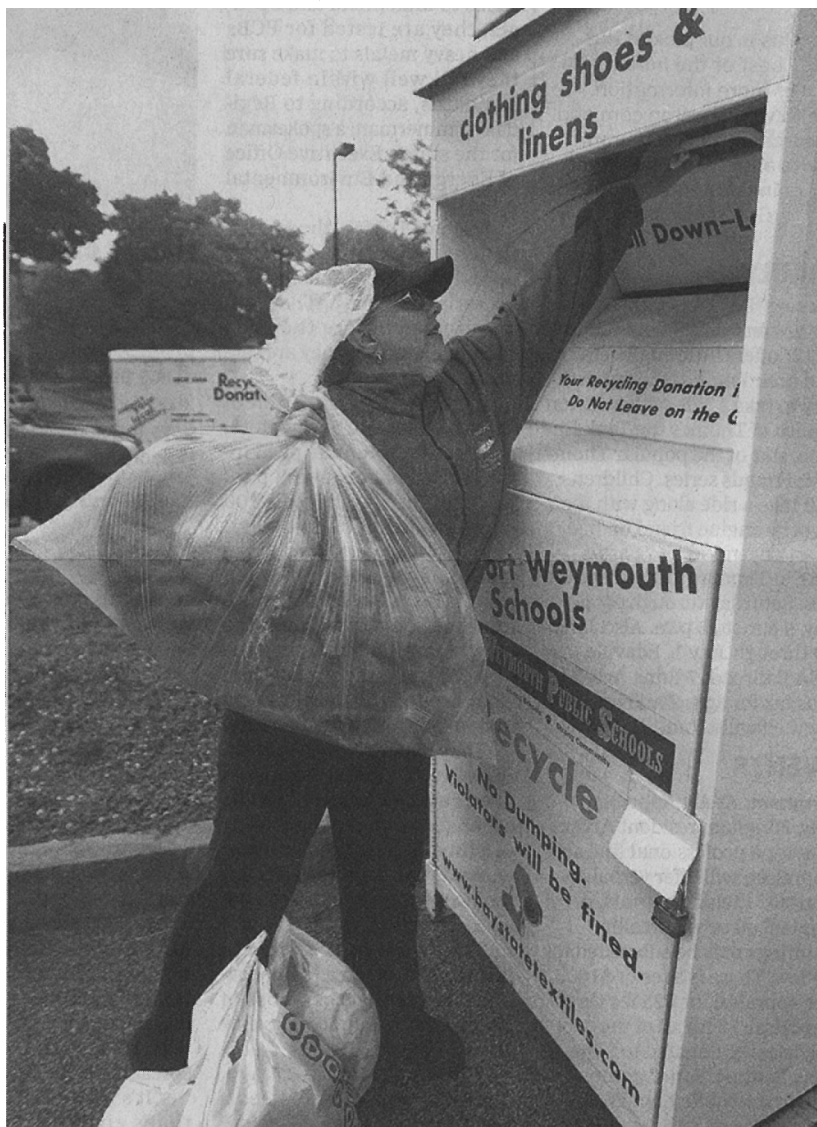
The Secondary Materials and Recycled Textiles Association, or SMART, also is working on educating the public, especially children in elementary school, according to former president Larry Groipen.

"We believe all this is going to begin with children," he said. "When a child sees a parent throwing away old clothes, we want [the child] to say, 'Stop! Somebody can use that!'"

Groipen said that 95 percent of used textiles can be reused or repurposed.

The material in the best condition — about 45 percent of the total — is used as apparel either in this country or abroad, he said. Developing countries have thriving second-hand clothing markets with thousands of people employed in cottage industries such as cutting down clothes for smaller sizes, or redesigning them to meet local tastes, he said.

The less pristine material — about 30 percent of recovered textiles — is cut into wiping and polishing cloths such as those produced by Groipen's company,



ERC Wiping Products in Lynn. The cloths are sold to factories, contractors, power plants, schools, repair businesses, or "everybody who doesn't have a closet and makes a mess," he said.

The even less appealing material, about 20 percent of the total, is shredded into fibers and used to make such things as insulation, sound proofing, carpet padding, and furniture stuffing, Groipen said. He said even zippers and buttons are reused, sometimes ground up for roofing material. And a company in Arizona specializes in grinding up blue jeans for insulation, he said.

"An average car contains about 50 pounds of recycled textiles. It's in the door panels, the carpet linings, hood linings, all over the place," he said.

About 5 percent of used textiles end up in the trash, he said.

"This is an industry that has been around forever that nobody ever pays any attention to," Groipen said. "SMART was green before green was smart. We're the original recyclers."

He said even he is surprised sometimes by the versatility of the system, noting that there's a market for single socks, which are ground up and mixed with new cotton fiber to make yarn. And single shoes are wanted, both for people in war-torn countries who have lost limbs, and "as a fashion statement in some areas where you wear a different shoe on each foot," he said.

"The key is people shouldn't judge. If

your great-grandmother dies and has an attic full of polyester clothes, donate it. It will be put to use," he said.

Groipen said charities in Massachusetts especially are making it clear that they'll take far more than "gently worn" goods and will sell what they can't use.

"That's not negative because what the charities really need is money to do their good work," he said. "They're coming out and saying we're not only a charity but the gateway to the recycling industry."

Bill LaBelle, director of operations for Morgan Memorial Goodwill Industries, said he's noticed that people are realizing that they can donate less-than-lovely apparel. He said about 80 percent of the donations his organization receives — a total of 10,861 tons last year in Eastern Massachusetts — go to Goodwill stores, including one in Quincy, with the rest sold to textile brokers.

LaBelle said he could take advantage of the new approach himself.

"When I got out of the Marine Corps, I had camouflage pants cut into shorts and used them around the yard," LaBelle said. "Once I got done with them, I could still donate those shorts that I made to Goodwill, and also the bottom cuff I'd cut off. And we would then distribute them to a fiber recycler and give them a reuse life."

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PHOTOS BY PAT GREENHOUSE/GLOBE STAFF

Steven Hansen, who works for a recycling company, Bay State Textiles, looks over donations left at Weymouth's Academy Avenue School, where (below) parent Bonnie Pineiro adds shoes, stuffed animals, and clothes to the collection.