



Reuse & Repair: A Backgrounder

Why are reuse and repair important?

By reusing items that are still in good condition and repairing those that are not, we are able to conserve resources by reducing demand for new products. These practices prevent the creation of waste in a number of ways. Products are diverted from landfill and recycling streams, and the waste produced through production, packaging, and transportation of new products are avoided. While British Columbia already has an established reuse economy with a range of reuse options available throughout the province, access to repair services is less widespread.

Reuse: The Current Landscape

Reuse provides an opportunity to extend the life of a good in its original form. Typically, items for reuse need to already be in good, re-sellable condition in order for them to be accepted by reuse organizations or sold privately.

British Columbians have a range of options for reuse of goods. Many charitable organizations operate thrift stores as part of their fundraising programs and accept a range of goods in resellable condition, including clothing, books, electronics, and reusable household items like furniture and cookware. Reuse websites like Surreyreuses.com, Craigslist, and Kijiji offer online classifieds for individuals to sell their unwanted items. Reusable building supply stores offer options for building materials in good condition that are excess from new construction or that have been salvaged.

Many municipalities and regional districts also host reuse events and provide facilities for the reuse of items. Some host Reuse Sheds and Share Sheds where residents can drop off reusable items for others to pick up, while others hold annual events such as the **Nanaimo Reuse Rendezvous**, the **RDCK Trash to Treasure Day**, and **Burnaby's City Wide Garage Sale Days**.

Reuse can also take a more creative form in creative reuse or repurposing, through which an item can be reimagined and reused for a new purpose. This can be as simple as using an empty candle container as storage, or as complex as building furniture items from salvaged wood flooring.

The Future of Reuse

While British Columbia has a robust reuse economy, there are opportunities for expansion and improvement. Reuse of building materials, through green salvage and reusable building supply stores as well as organizations like the Habitat for Humanity ReStores, exists in limited capacity throughout the province. Construction, renovation, and demolition waste continue to be significant contributors to landfill garbage, with opportunities to improve waste diversion through reuse of salvaged materials.

Repair: The Current Landscape

Repair allows for the extension of the life of a good that is no longer in good or usable condition. This can be as simple as replacing a button on a shirt, and can be complicated enough to require specialized professionals.

There are a number of organizations, both local and global, that hold repair events and workshops. These events provide tools and other resources to enable individuals to make simple repairs with support from knowledgeable volunteers.

[Repair Cafés](#) are part of a growing global network aiming to provide opportunities for individuals to learn to make simple repairs. Most of the items brought to these events are small electronic goods, bicycles, and clothing, and these events provide information, tools, and support to help people learn to repair those items themselves. Similar repair events are offered by a range of other community groups throughout the province, such as [Repair Matters](#) in the Greater Vancouver area.

Barriers to Repair

Many items that are repairable may not be repaired due to a lack of access to repair facilities, a lack of repair knowledge or access to knowledgeable tradespeople, or a lack of availability of necessary parts, equipment, or information. Organizations like thrift stores and charities who accept second-hand items for reuse often do not have sufficient resources to repair damaged or otherwise unusable items that are donated to them. Often, this means that these donations are disposed of as garbage when they cannot be sold or reused.

Often, products are manufactured in such a way that repair is challenging or impossible, and repair using third party parts or not through the manufacturer may void any warranties. Planned obsolescence occurs when products are designed with an artificially limited lifespan, leading to items being disposed of prematurely and potentially making those items more difficult to repair.

The Future of Repair

As of January 2018, [17 U.S. States have had Right to Repair legislation introduced](#), proposing that whoever purchases a device should be able to easily repair it. This legislation generally proposes that manufacturers be required to make repair manuals, parts, tools, and diagnostic software available to consumers. Though no such legislation has been introduced in Canada for consumer goods in general, there is a right to repair agreement in place for vehicles, titled the [Canadian Automotive Service Information Standard](#). This agreement provides a framework for manufacturers to provide information regarding service and repairs to the automotive aftermarket industry, particularly applicable to repairs involving software reprogramming and updates.

There are many opportunities to improve access to repair in British Columbia. There are several examples of a policy to incentivize and improve access to repair around the world, which could serve as example for potential policy in BC. In Sweden the VAT (Value Added Tax) for repair services has been reduced from 25% to 12%, beginning January 1, 2017, in order to encourage residents to repair broken items rather than replacing them. [France passed legislation in 2015 making planned obsolescence illegal](#), and also has legislation requiring manufacturers inform customers how long replacement parts will be available for their products. In 2017 the European Union Commission made recommendations for

making repair and spare parts more available to consumers, specifying that essential components like batteries should not be fixed into products, and that spare parts should be made available at a fair price.

Learn more about reuse and repair at the 44th annual RCBC Zero Waste Conference held in Whistler from May 30 – June 1, 2018. Register today at <http://www.rcbcconference.ca>.



For more information, contact the BC Recycling Hotline at 604-732-9253 or 1-800-667-4321.