



4/25/2022

RLI's Recycling Efforts Help Do What's Right with What's Left

RLI has a history of environmental stewardship through initiatives implemented to conserve natural resources and reduce our carbon footprint. This week, we take a closer look at RLI's recycling program.

An Evolution of Processes, Practices and Partnerships

RLI has been mindfully recycling since 2007. While the company's recycling of paper, cardboard, metals, plastics, light bulbs, computer equipment, batteries and more has progressively increased over the past 15 years, processes and practices have evolved—due in large part to partnerships with recycling and resale companies.

"It's been an evolution over time," said Greg Tiemeier, AVP of Administrative Services, who leads RLI's office, equipment and furniture recycling efforts. "While RLI has always been conscious about recycling and overall sustainability, we've continued to improve on the amount of materials and methods in which we recycle, as well as who we partner with in our efforts."

From 2012-2020, RLI donated or recycled a total of 805 tons of material, including paper, cardboard, plastic, metal, furniture and electronics. As a point of reference, that's five times heavier than the Statue of Liberty without its base! While RLI's recycling outreach spans a number of outside companies and nonprofits, two of the major players in RLI's recycling efforts are ANEW® (Asset Network for Education Worldwide, Inc.) and Goodwill.

Doing What's Right with What's Left®

ANEW is a Los Angeles-based company founded in 2005 that helps extend the life cycle of surplus office furniture through reuse, repurposing and recycling. RLI partners with ANEW when updating offices from the West Coast to the East Coast and everywhere in between.

"Our motto is, 'Doing what's right with what's left,'" said Rose Tourje, ANEW's Founder and President. RLI has partnered with ANEW and their Surplus Stewardship® program since 2017. "Surplus Stewardship is a certified program where companies hired by ANEW go into office buildings or other locations to disassemble and remove office furniture," Rose explained. "We then work to evaluate what can be used in another company facility, what can be repurposed elsewhere and what can be recycled."



Furniture from the RLI Portland office donated and repurposed by ANEW.

Through this program, ANEW is able to help steward companies' surplus furniture and other items away from landfills and back into their communities through local charities, nonprofits, public agencies and underserved communities. Some items are donated to nonprofits such as United Way and their partner agencies; some are broken down for scrap material and others are passed on for resale to agencies like Goodwill.

"We become a single source for a company to take away any surplus items that they have identified for us and that we confirm by a detailed inventory," she said.

It's All About Goodwill

To recycle and repurpose items such as office supplies, appliances, computers and printers, RLI partners with Goodwill locations throughout the country, including Goodwill of Central Illinois, led by CEO Don Johnson. "We have a strong relationship with Greg and the RLI team here in Peoria," said Don. "When it comes to the electronics we receive, some are sold in

their stores but most are broken down to harvest the precious metals inside or sent to Dell through our partnership with the Dell Reconnect program, which is a service that accepts used electronics and chooses to reuse, refurbish or recycle them."



Goodwill driver Jim McFarland loads up used RLI electronics for recycling.

"Before partnering with Goodwill, we used to pay a recycling company to take bulk boxes of computer equipment we didn't use anymore," explained Greg. "Among the many benefits of Goodwill is that there are locations nationwide, so not only have we donated here in Peoria, but in Phoenix, Los Angeles and Portland, to name a few. When we travel to a branch office to change locations or make updates, we often rent a van because we know we're going to be making trips to Goodwill or sending items back to the home office or on to another branch for reuse."

In addition to Goodwill, RLI works with a number of area nonprofits when it has a surplus of used office furniture, computers and other office items. "In the Peoria area alone, we've probably donated to more than 20 nonprofits," said Andy Cook, Facilities Supervisor. "These organizations have little or no budget for things like office furniture and supplies, so we're happy to help them out whenever we can."

Recycling Role Models

Did you know that many of RLI's office buildings contain furniture made of recycled steel and carpet made of recycled materials? And that RLI has reduced the use of non-network printers by 70% since 2015, considerably reducing paper usage at RLI? Or that RLI recycles all its batteries at no cost through Batteries Plus in exchange for purchasing batteries from the company at a discounted rate?



RLI Transportation has reduced their number of printers from 12 to one!

"I think our recycling efforts show the kind of company we are," said Greg. "We care about being good stewards of our resources, even when we don't need them anymore."

"It's wonderful to have a recycling partnership with a company like RLI that is engaged and invested in the community," said Rose, who shared that RLI is being presented with the ANEW Sustainability Champion Award. "This award is presented to those who stand out and go above and beyond with their sustainability efforts," she explained. "I think it's important to highlight the companies like RLI and individuals like Greg who have such a passion for Surplus Stewardship and are so dedicated to doing the right thing."

Employees can do their part both at work and at home. "Perhaps the most important step is to be conscious of where you put your trash," said Beth Walsh, Manager, Facilities Planning. "Recyclable materials are thrown away at RLI every day simply because people don't think about what where to put them." RLI provides associates in offices with blue recycling cans for paper only, and in many offices, there are separate recycling bins for plastic, aluminum, and even the K-cups used in Keurig machines. "In fact," said Beth, "if everyone switched from RLI-provided paper cups to reusable coffee mugs, the company could save more than \$6,000 in the home office alone, and this cost is quickly growing with recent shortages in paper cups. If you don't have a reusable coffee mug, let us know in Facilities and we'll provide you with one!"

At home, Don reminds individuals to donate used clothing, shoes, jewelry, household items and more no matter what the condition of the items. "What we don't resell in our Goodwill stores, we send to third world countries or to be used for recycled steel, carpeting and plastics," he said.

"We can all do our part to help the environment, whether that's recycling, donating or just taking better care of our environment," said Greg. "I'm proud to work for a company that continues to implement initiatives that help reduce our carbon footprint."

Feature story by Leah Jorgensen, Intern, RLI Human Resources