

Home remodeling



Home remodeling can be a big source of waste. The Environmental Protection Agency estimates that the amount of construction and demolition waste generated in the United States is more than double the amount of household trash generated annually. Remodeling projects accounts for an estimated 22 percent of all the construction and demolition waste. With a plan and a little extra time, much of that waste can be avoided or diverted for reuse or recycling.

Reduce

Less is more. Smaller homes generate less waste over a lifetime of use and maintenance. Spend more per square foot on higher quality materials and finishes instead of maximizing the total square footage of your project. The website notsobighouse.com is a great resource for designing spaces that are not as big as you thought you needed to perfectly suit the way you live. Skip the latest must-haves and stick to simple, classic designs and finishes that endure over time.



Reuse

Many furnishings and finishes can be reused rather than trashed. For example, cabinets and vanities can take on a new life with a fresh coat of paint or stain and new hardware. Sinks and tubs can be refreshed by replacing the faucet.

Reusing building materials preserves what is referred to as the embodied energy of the materials. Embodied energy is the energy used by all the processes involved in producing a material, from harvesting natural resources to manufacturing to delivery. Reusing materials you already have not only reduces waste but also saves money.

If you aren't able to reuse what you already have, you can still incorporate reuse and avoid the embodied emissions of new products into your project by buying used. Buying used building materials closes the loop on the reuse system and sends a message that salvaged products are valued. Plus, used building materials can provide unique character and one-of-a-kind style to your project.

Cabinets, flooring, sinks, light fixtures and much more can be found at used building material stores across the metro. Architectural Antiques, Bauer Brothers Salvage, Better Futures Minnesota, City Salvage, Guided Salvage, Habitat for Humanity ReStore and Scrapbox Salvage are all options for used and period-specific building materials. Craigslist, eBay, Facebook Marketplace and online garage sale groups also have used or surplus building materials.

Visit hennepin.us/salvage for home improvement and repair organizations, or check the event listing at hennepin.us/choosetoreuse for upcoming sales. Hennepin County offers grant funding for projects that incorporate used building materials. Learn more at hennepin.us/building-reuse.

Donation and deconstruction

In addition to selling used building materials, many home improvement retailers also accept donations, and some offer pick-up service. Make sure you share your reuse plans with your contractor so items aren't destroyed during removal.

Bauer Brothers Salvage, Better Futures Minnesota, and the Birch Group also offer deconstruction services, which is a process that involves carefully taking a building apart to preserve the materials for reuse. Deconstruction prioritizes salvaging materials for reuse and then recycling what is not reusable. The process minimizes the amount of unusable and non-recyclable materials that end up in a landfill.

This method can be used rather than demolition for both partial and full building removal. Deconstruction can take longer and cost more, but tax credits for donating the building materials help reduce the cost, and this method can divert as much as 85 to 90 percent of the building material. Hennepin County also offers grant funding for deconstruction projects. Learn more at hennepin.us/building-reuse.

Recycling

After you've reduced and reuse as much as possible, there are recycling opportunities for many materials. The gold standard for recycling construction and demolition debris is to sort the materials onsite and then have them sent to the various processors of those materials.

If your site only has room for a mixed-waste dumpster, make sure the dumpster is going to a construction and demolition waste processing facility in the Twin Cities that diverts materials for recycling: Broadway Resource Recovery (Atomic) or Dem-Con. These recycling processors take mixed construction and demolition waste, sort it, and divert 60 to 70 percent of the material from landfills.

Let your contractor know before work starts that you want the material recycled at one of these places, and ask for the receipts to ensure it went where you specified.

Tools

Become a member of a tool library or borrow tools from your family, neighbors, or friends. The Minnesota Tool Library has more than 5,000 tools available for its members to borrow. Learn more at mntoolibrary.org.

