

# More ways in the works to recycle mattresses

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KLCC

The thing about a mattress is that there's no obvious way to recycle it.

"We tried shredding the mattresses and that didn't work," said Terry McDonald, the director of the St. Vincent de Paul Society of Lane County in Eugene. A couple of decades ago, McDonald helped develop the country's first large-scale recycling program for mattresses.

Being the first meant they made a lot of mistakes.

"We tried cutting off the materials using an air knife, and then we tried a water knife, and then we tried a grinder to take them off," said McDonald. "That started a lot of fires."

It turns out, recycling a mattress takes elbow grease and time. In a nondescript warehouse in a Eugene industrial district, St. Vincent de Paul workers take apart mattresses piece by piece.

It takes some effort, but McDonald says some workers can take apart more than 50 mattresses a day. With just a handful of work stations, this facility can process more than 3,000 mattresses a month. And he said once they're dismantled, up to 90% of each mattress can be recycled.

"Some of them are more difficult than others," said McDonald. "There are some mattresses that have something called a pocket coil. It's a nylon baggie around each coil that's very difficult to recycle. But most everything else can be recycled on these things."

Despite the mountains of mattresses that line the walls here, McDonald said the vast majority of mattresses in Oregon end up in landfills. State lawmakers approved a bill this year that's meant to change that.

Starting in 2024, a fee



A worker takes apart a mattress at a St. Vincent de Paul recycling facility in Eugene.

Chris Lehman/KLCC

## DROPPING OFF A MATTRESS OR BOX SPRING FOR RECYCLING WILL ALWAYS BE FREE UNDER THE PROGRAM

will be added to the purchase of a new mattress. The amount is still to be determined, but it ranges from \$10 to \$16 dollars in the other three states with a similar fee. The money will be used to establish a state-wide mattress collection and recycling program.

"In the law there's a

minimum convenience standard that the mattress stewardship program has to ensure that collection is convenient and that there's locations across the state available in both the urban and rural areas of the state," said Suna Bayrakal of the Product Stewardship Institute, which testified in favor

of the proposal.

The chief backer of the mattress recycling bill in Salem was state Sen. James Manning, a Eugene Democrat, who pushed for it over several legislative sessions.

"Anything that is worth having is worth pursuing," said Manning. "This is a model that is long overdue, and I think that it's going to reap more benefits, for not just Oregon, but for the planet itself."

The new law requires the mattress industry to work out the details of how

the collection system will work. But dropping off a mattress or box spring for recycling will always be free under the program.

McDonald said that will hopefully cut down on the number of times people illegally dump old mattresses along the side of the road.

"Unfortunately, I can't force people to do the right thing," he said. "Having said that, since there's a way for them to dispose of it, under this law, for free, and a place that's close by

them, there's no point in them hauling it off into the middle of the woods."

The idea of charging consumers a recycling fee on the purchase of a product isn't new. In 2010, Oregon established a first-in-the-nation stewardship program for paint. Since then, nine other states and the District of Columbia have set up similar programs.

Oregon will be the fourth state with a mattress recycling fee. The others are California, Connecticut and Rhode Island.

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