



Association pour la santé environnementale du Québec
Environmental Health Association of Québec

ECO-JOURNAL

June 2021

Julien Lanouette-Babin

The 3 RE Theory The Other Two Concepts Part 3

In reference to Parts 1 and 2: From the Earth Day Network, the 3 RE Theory is a set of actions (reduce, reuse, recycle, enhance) that you can apply every day to restore our planet. The first concept of this theory is related, for example, to refusing things you do not need and limiting the over-packaging of products. Another concept, recycling, is associated with the treatment of material waste in order to make it suitable for reuse. In this article, I will write about the other two concepts that complete the 3 RE Theory.

In the 3 RE Theory, reuse is the second step in the waste pyramid. According to its definition in the dictionary, this concept corresponds to 'the act or process of using something again'. Here are some examples of applications related to this concept:

- Giving a second life to common consumables such as plastic bags or sheets of paper (using their reverse sides);
- Repair or restore everyday objects by sewing, bonding or other processes;
- Refurbish products (or their major components) – by changing only worn-out pieces and consumable parts – to make them new products ready for resale (such as refurbished car engines and auto parts);
- Shop or exchange items (such as clothing, toys, furniture, and appliances) at thrift stores or charities like the Salvation Army;
- Return glass bottles or aluminum cans to designated deposit points in your city.

Corresponding to the last step in the waste pyramid of the 3 RE Theory, the concept of enhance is seen as a variation of the concept of recycling. According to its dictionary definition, this concept means "rising to a higher degree". Applied to the world of waste, this definition corresponds to enriching the material you have produced and giving it a new use value. Several processes are part of this, including:





- Composting organic waste to renew and enrich the soil;
- The use of biogas generated by the burial of organic waste to produce energy;
- Incineration of energy-intensive waste (such as wood residue) to produce energy.

As mentioned in the last paragraph, composting is seen as a way to recycle the organic waste you produce. Classified as one of the rotting methods which corresponds to the last R of the Zero Waste Movement (see Part 1 for more details), this process is associated with the biological decomposition of organic waste under controlled conditions. The end product is a humus-like material that can be added to soils to increase fertility, aeration, and nutrient retention. All composts require three basic ingredients:

- Brown matter, such as dead leaves and branches, which will provide carbon to your compost;
- Green matter, such as vegetable scraps and fruit leftovers, which will provide nitrogen to your compost;
- Water, which will provide moisture to your compost to help break down the organic matter.

Finally, note that you can participate in municipal composting (if offered) or otherwise make your own homemade compost.

To conclude this topic, it is wise to remember and apply every day the three concepts of the 3 RE Theory: *reduce* your consumption, *reuse* your daily products, *recycle* by giving a second life to several materials with your municipality, and *enhance* the organic waste produced through composting. By following these concepts, you are closer to a simpler and more sustainable lifestyle. And remember: one person's waste is a good thing for another person.

Online links:

- The 5 R's of Zero Waste: A Practical Guide, by Jenna Judd, Zero Waste Exchange, published July 7, 2017, <https://zerowastexchange.org/551/the-5-rs-of-zero-waste-a-practical-guide>
- Solid Waste Glossary: Composting, Solid Waste Association of North America (SWANA), Copyright in 2021, <https://swana.org/resources/solid-waste-glossary>



- Three R's, Wikipédia, the free encyclopedia, last changes made on May 18, 2020, https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trois_R
- Composting at home, Environmental Protection Agency, last updated March 31, 2021, <https://www.epa.gov/recycle/composting-home>
- Definition of Reuse at Dictionary.com, accessed April 11, 2021, <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/reuse>
- Definition of Enhance at Dictionary.com, accessed April 11, 2021, <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/enhance>