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TOP STORY

## Quick Green Tip: Turning old clothes into new opportunities

By David Goldstein  
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**Isabel Hartley, director of operations for Homeboy Threads, explains to a tour group how un-reusable textiles are turned into “shoddy” stuffing for insulation, mattresses and plush toys.**

(David Goldstein)




On April 24 — just two days after Earth Day — Ventura County residents will have a chance to reduce textile waste while supporting jobs and second chances. From 8 a.m. to 3 p.m., the County of Ventura’s Public Works Agency and General Services Agency will host a Textile and E-Waste Recycling event at the Ventura County Government Center.

Year round, residents can drop off used clothing at thrift stores and e-waste at collection centers, but this event offers both textile reuse and also recycling for textiles that would not be re-sellable at thrift stores.

“Textile waste is one of the fastest growing waste streams in the United States,” says Upasna Singh, a New York–based stylist and founder of a luxury accessories brand focused on sustainability. Citing a recent U.S. Government Accountability Office report, she notes that Americans discard nearly 17 million tons of textiles each year, with about 85% ending up in landfills or incinerators. “When clothing is designed to be worn only a few times, landfill becomes the default outcome,” she adds.

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According to CalRecycle, Californians throw away about 1.2 million tons of textiles annually, roughly 3% of everything landfilled statewide. The problem has prompted policy. The state’s Responsible Textile Recovery Act, signed into law in 2024, shifts textiles away

from disposal and toward reuse, repair and recycling.

Arif Gasilov, a partner at Gasilov Group who works on sustainability strategy, says the law represents a fundamental shift. “The cost of managing textile waste is shifting from local governments and taxpayers to the companies producing the clothing,” he explains. “Fees will be eco-modulated, meaning producers of cheaper, less durable garments pay more.”

In other words, the economics of fast fashion may finally begin to change.

“The new textile recovery law is designed to prioritize existing businesses and programs to uplift economic and environmental benefits close to home,” explained Joanne Brasch, assistant director of the California Product Stewardship Council, the sponsor of the legislation.

But policy changes take time. In the meantime, local action — like the April 24 event — remains essential.

Residents can bring clean clothing; matched pairs of shoes and socks; handbags and backpacks; and household textiles such as towels, sheets and curtains. New, unopened undergarments and swimwear are also accepted.

Some items cannot be accepted, including soiled clothing, used pillows or comforters, pre-worn undergarments, stuffed toys, rugs and non-textile materials.

A key partner in the event is Homeboy Industries, a social enterprise of Homeboy Threads, that will manage the collected textiles through its domestic reuse and recycling networks, while supporting one of the nation’s most successful re-entry programs for formerly incarcerated individuals.

“We provide hope, training and support to help people transform their lives and become contributing members of our community,” said Chris Zwicke, CEO of Homeboy Threads. “Our team is transforming work into opportunity, and waste into possibility.”

Beyond recycling, experts emphasize clothing design and use can impact waste. Brian Lim, founder of apparel brands iHeartRaves and INTO THE AM, points to durability as a critical factor. “A lot of what ends up in landfills was never designed to last,” he says. “If a

piece only holds up for a few wears, it never makes it to resale or donation.” Buying clothing designed to last and repairing items you own are the best ways to reduce waste.

The April 24 event also includes e-waste collection — anything with a cord or battery — though lightbulbs, loose batteries and large appliances are not accepted. Proper disposal matters: When electronics are not recycled correctly, they can release hazardous substances into the environment.

As an added incentive, while supplies last, participants can receive up to two free bags of Peach Hill Soils garden mulch and learn more about the county’s waste reduction programs.

Earth Day is officially April 22, but its message extends well beyond a single date. Events like this one offer a practical way to act on that message — connecting individual decisions to larger environmental and social outcomes.

As Singh puts it, “Buying fewer, better-made garments and participating in local textile recovery programs can significantly reduce pollution while extending the life of what we already own.”

Access the collection event via Telephone Road at Lark Avenue, following signs to the General Services Agency.

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