

# How To Recycle Inhalers | Earth911.com

## How To Recycle Inhalers



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If you need an inhaler, the chances are good you think about that little device pretty often — making sure you have it when you head to the gym or out in nature, making sure you have a replacement canister when the number of remaining puffs gets low. And if you're an environmentalist, you might think about how to properly dispose of the box of empties in your garage.

The well-known metered-dose inhalers rely on propellants. Until the Montreal Protocol, those propellants were chlorofluorocarbons. CFCs have long since been [replaced](#) by hydrofluoroalkanes, which are still greenhouse gases but are far less damaging than CFCs.

The [dry powder inhaler](#) and [soft mist inhaler](#) types are greener choices, but only if they are appropriate for your condition. [Ten Americans](#) die every day from asthma. Inhalers are literally lifesaving devices. Their use is not optional and no one should switch medications without their doctor's approval.

That makes the question of proper inhaler disposal even more important. Some inhalers may come with disposal instructions, but most of us do not know what to do with our empty and expired inhalers. Can we recycle inhalers?

### Canisters

In the United Kingdom, inhaler canisters should be [returned to a pharmacy](#), where they will either be treated as medical waste after the greenhouse gases are destroyed, or be recycled through the [GSK scheme](#), a protocol for returning and recycling inhalers developed by GlaxoSmithKline, an inhaler manufacturer.

Unfortunately, the question is trickier in the United States, where there is no national or federally sponsored disposal or recycling program.

Unless they are completely empty, canisters should not be [thrown in the garbage](#). Not only are they hazardous waste because of the drugs they may still contain, they are also pressurized. They may even explode in the landfill or incinerator.

Because they are made from metal, inhaler canisters are technically recyclable, but they require special handling. In most cases, municipal programs will not accept inhalers because of the risks involved in processing them, but contact your recycling provider to see if they accept inhaler canisters before searching for other options.

### Dispensers

Because they are not under pressure and do not contain medicine, the plastic dispensers that fit on inhaler canisters may be easier to recycle. Before you toss empty dispensers in your curbside bin, check with your local recycling program to see if they accept plastics.

Many municipal programs don't or will not accept the particular type of plastic used in inhaler dispensers. But it is worth checking.

### Safe Disposal

GlaxoSmithKline [launched the first](#) national inhaler recycling program in the U.S. in 2012, like the one they operate in the England. But the U.S. program appears to have quietly folded since then.

[Medicine take-back](#) and recycling programs are in constant flux in the U.S., and their rules can be confusing. At the moment, [Walgreens](#) lists inhalers among the accepted items in its safe disposal program. Other pharmacies offer safe disposal programs as well. But it's always a good idea to call medicine take-back program drop-off sites in advance to confirm that they accept inhalers.

Some places, such as [Washington state](#), have publicly funded medicine take-back programs that may accept outdated or partially used inhalers. Because every state and locality has its own rules, our best advice is to assume canisters are generally not accepted and the dispenser may be recycled if your local program accepts plastic.

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