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IKEA Launches Buy-Back Program



By [Gemma Alexander](#)

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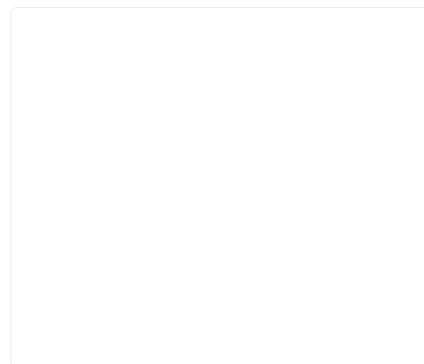
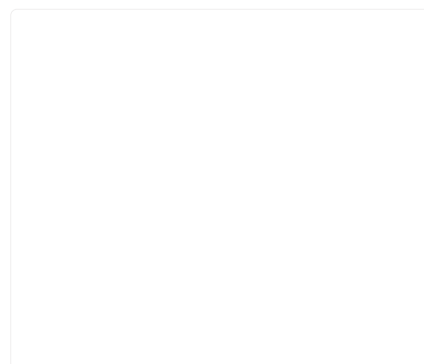
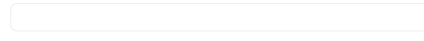
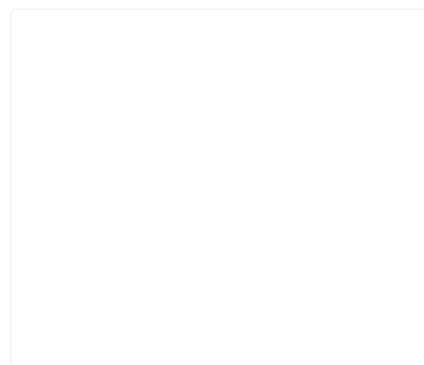
[IKEA, producer responsibility](#)



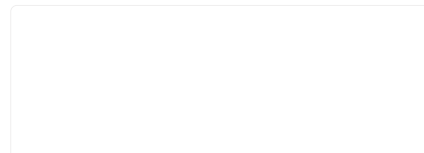
Even if you've never shopped at IKEA, you know about the global furniture giant. And you probably have shopped there – **every 10 seconds**, a Billy bookcase is sold somewhere in the world. IKEA's affordable furniture has filled many a childhood bedroom and helped generations transition from that bedroom to their first apartment. But the problem with starter furniture is that it is easier to buy than to get rid of. Now IKEA is making the transition to more permanent pieces a little easier, too.

IKEA Good and Bad

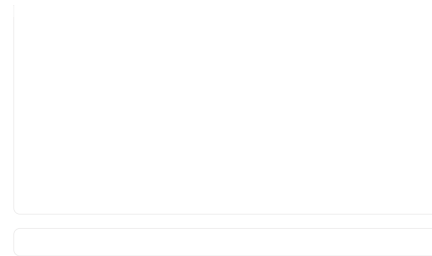
Like most large retailers, IKEA's environmental record is a mixed



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bag. Although stylish and cheap, many IKEA products are infamously disposable. Their particle board and laminate construction doesn't always hold up to extended daily use, and recycling is not an option. In the past, IKEA **has struggled** with high **formaldehyde** levels in its glues and lacquers and child labor in its Asian textile manufacturing facilities. The company continues to face **political and financial** criticism. However, IKEA has a track record of addressing environmental issues and proactively working to improve its environmental footprint through incremental change. Thanks to investments in wind and solar power, IKEA produces as much clean energy as it uses, and may be **on track** to achieve climate neutrality by 2030.



Main Materials

Wood is the most-used raw material in IKEA's products. IKEA is the largest wood buyer on the planet; it used 21 million cubic meters of wood in 2019. IKEA has a long-standing partnership with World Wildlife Fund and the Forest Stewardship Council to improve the sustainability of the wood it uses. Its history with FSC-certification has been rocky. In 2014, FSC **suspended** the company's certification over old-growth logging in Russia. In June 2020, the nonprofit **Earthsight** reported that IKEA used wood illegally logged in Ukraine. But the wood was falsely labeled FSC-certified, which raised the question of whether the **lapse in oversight** was IKEA's or FSC's. Perhaps in response, IKEA launched its **Forest Positive Agenda for 2030** last year, and claims that 98% of the wood used for IKEA products is now either FSC-certified or recycled.

IKEA uses approximately 0.7% of all cotton grown around the world. Although not fully organic, since 2015, none of **IKEA's cotton** has been conventionally-grown. Working with the World Wildlife Fund and the Better Cotton Initiative, IKEA's cotton growers use less water, chemical fertilizers, and pesticides than is typical in the industry.

Producer Responsibility

Americans usually think that once you buy something you are responsible for it, even after it's no longer functional. **Producer responsibility** is a radical shift from that approach that engages manufacturers in the entire lifecycle of their products, including end-of-life disposal. This makes them more likely to **design products for recyclability**.

In practice, producer responsibility usually takes the form of take-back programs. For some products like **prescription**

medicine and **electronics**, take-back or trade-in programs enable safer disposal or recycling of special components. For safer products, like used **clothing**, take-back programs are often the first step in a resale system that helps to extend the useful life of the product while making a brand more accessible to budget or eco-minded customers.



IKEA's newly launched buy-back program accepts only certain all-wood furniture items in good condition. Photo: ManuPadilla – stock.adobe.com

IKEA Buys Back

Producer responsibility is more established in Europe (**France** is particularly invested in the approach) where the Swedish company IKEA still makes **70% of its sales**. Now IKEA is introducing producer responsibility to 37 of its American stores in a program called Buy Back & Resell. The program is only available to **IKEA Family** members and many product classes are excluded. But for some all-wood furniture styles in good condition, customers can sell their gently used IKEA furniture back to IKEA in exchange for store credit. The program currently accepts:

- Office drawer cabinets, small structures with drawers
- Display storage without glass
- Sideboards
- Bookcases and shelf units
- Small tables
- Multimedia furniture
- Cabinets
- Dining tables and desks
- Chairs and stools without upholstery

After filling out an **online form**, program members bring their eligible furniture to a participating retail location for inspection. IKEA resells approved items in the store's AS-IS area. The second-hand items provide an even more affordable option for some customers, while the original owners earn store credit for

new purchases. IKEA is working to eliminate legal restrictions on buy-back programs in the locations of its remaining 14 U.S. stores.

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By [Gemma Alexander](#)

Gemma Alexander has an M.S. in urban horticulture and a backyard filled with native plants. After working in a genetics laboratory and at a landfill, she now writes about the environment, the arts and family. See more of her writing [here](#).

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