

# Make something unique out of old furniture

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Millions of tonnes of old furniture are thrown away every year. The EPA (Environmental Protection Agency), estimates that 10 million tonnes of furniture waste go into landfills in the US alone, with UK and Australia being alarmingly commensurate! Across the world, 4-5% of household waste is found to be furniture.

Only 31% of Indian population is urban, but it amounts to a staggering 377 million people as per the 2011 census. In 2014-15 they generated 1.44 metric tonnes per day of municipal solid waste, according to the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB). Even if Indians were credited for their frugal nature and assigned a conservative coefficient of no more than 10% of global standards, they could still be wasting almost 700 metric tonnes per day of furniture in garbage dumps! That's about the weight of nearly 105 elephants, and with rampant urbanisation it can only get worse from now.

In 2016, as part of the Swachh Bharat Mission, the Central Public Health and Environmental Engineering Organisation (CPHEEO) along with the Ministry of Urban Development (MoUD) released the Municipal Solid Waste Management Manual, which mooted the idea of an Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR). This new policy holds a producer responsible for the post-consumer stage of a product.

It typically defines separate tasks for collection, reuse and recycle; or storage and treatment of different product categories at the end of their normal life cycles. EPR programmes require national or state level mandates through legislation. Or else, there should be voluntary schemes such as retail take-backs or product exchange programmes. This would ensure sustainable disposal of products and protect the environment from pollution.

So, please consider donating used furniture instead of dumping them. Someone may still have a use for it. Did you know that most of our home and office furniture can be recycled? With a little imagination it is possible to turn discardable stuff into something new and amazing. A fresh coat of paint or varnish for instance, else an antique flourish could make worn out accessories appealing. Old couches and chairs can be economically upholstered to look fresh with bold fabric. Repurposed or upcycled furniture is the new rage in the home décor industry.

Some creative ideas include broken ladders resurrected as hand towel or blanket stands, old doors converted into stylish headboards for beds, wood packing crates repurposed to stack magazines and travel trunks refashioned ingeniously into coffee tables or display cabinets. My design studio has entrance doors from rural homes as false ceiling!

Consider refurbishing your old furniture for re-use or just exchange it as is. There are marketplaces and websites, which allow individuals to sell used items. Such programmes link sellers of used furniture with potential second hand furniture buyers. For furniture, let EPR be voluntary. If all else fails, remember that most furniture is of wood, metal or some material that could be stripped away and recycled. Never send it as a whole to languish in some landfill! Governmental interventions in matters such as waste segregation and disposal should be the last resort. Without a doubt, sustainable solid waste management is in your hands.