

# Bulky Items

Your guide to transfer station bulky item collections.

## What are bulky items?

Bulky items are large solid waste items that cannot be handled or managed in the same way as solid waste of smaller size. Bulky items can include (but are not limited to):

- ✓ Mattresses
- ✓ Furniture
- ✓ Appliances (for more information, see the *Appliances* quick start guide)
- ✓ Brush, tree stumps, and other yard waste
- ✓ Construction and demolition (C&D) waste
- ✓ Large metal items

## Management and Disposal



Bulky item collection event

Bulky waste items require special collection, processing, and disposal methods, which can result in significant management costs. Bulky items also fill waste containers quickly.

Communities benefit from accessible and convenient drop-off and disposal options for large items that cannot fit in curbside bins or are not part of regular trash or recycling collection. Otherwise, a lack of convenient options can result in an increase in illegal dumping.

Transfer stations often impose quantity or size limits on bulky items or charge additional fees due to special management. To manage bulky items:

- ✓ Determine which bulky items to accept.
- ✓ Set limits on quantity and size for acceptance.
- ✓ Schedule collection or drop-off of times for bulky items to avoid overcrowding and overwhelming limited storage space.

## State Requirements

Some localities closely regulate bulky items, especially mattresses.

- ✓ Contact the state environmental agency or local landfill to determine the best course of action for specific waste types.
- ✓ Observe applicable state and local limits for bulky items transported to and disposed of at solid waste facilities off Tribal lands.

## Reuse

Often, bulky items that one person is looking to get rid of could be reused by someone else. Consider designating an area of the transfer station, preferably paved and sheltered, as a reuse section where items like non-upholstered furniture, bikes, grills, and basketball hoops can be taken and used by others. For example, the [Chickasaw Nation Reuse Center](#) promotes the reuse of household items. Additionally, some transfer stations partner with volunteers to repair bikes and gift them to kids in the community.

Reclaimed building materials like windows and doors should be stored upright and protected from the weather. Corrugated metal and lumber can be set aside and repurposed for a shed or fencing.

## Handling Specific Bulky Waste Types

### Furniture

Bulky waste furniture can be a challenge to process. Often, couches, chairs, dressers, desks, and bed frames cannot be recycled without significant processing due to combinations of materials in different proportions (e.g., wood, metal, wool, cotton, leather, fabrics, foam, and other padding). Additionally, most furniture takes up significant space and may take special equipment (e.g., backhoes) to disassemble or push down into a dumpster.

### Brush and Tree Stumps

Brush and tree stumps frequently end up in landfills following landscaping and maintenance or invasive species removal efforts. Brush can be broken down into chips to use as mulch or for compost bulking. However, large tree stumps are especially difficult to manage:

- ✓ They do not decompose readily.
- ✓ Stumps require specialized equipment to split them into smaller pieces before standard wood processing equipment can reduce them.
- ✓ If local law allows, stumps may be burned, but they often require a considerable amount of time to burn fully.



Waste tree stumps and brush

### Processing Tree Stumps

Check whether local haulers or landfills accept tree stumps. If yes:

- ✓ Determine if they charge an additional handling fee.
- ✓ Ask if they have acceptance criteria (e.g., limit the size or weight or require the stump to be free of dirt and rocks).

## Mattresses

Mattresses are often cumbersome to manage at transfer stations. They do not compress well and take up a lot of space. If mattresses absorb water, they become heavy, difficult to move, and susceptible to mold. Mattresses must be stored properly or removed frequently, otherwise they can attract vermin like rats, ticks, and cockroaches.

### Mattress Storage

- ✓ Store mattresses in a covered area to protect them from rain.
- ✓ Load them into the transfer container as soon as practical.

### Mattress Recycling

Up to 75 percent of a mattress is recyclable; the challenge is locating a recycler. Recyclers do not accept exceptionally soiled or moldy mattresses or mattresses infested with bed bugs.

- ✓ Check the state-by-state list of mattress recyclers maintained on the [Mattress Recycling Council's \(MRC\) website](#). The MRC operates mattress (and sometimes box spring) recycling programs in several states including California, Oregon, Connecticut, and Rhode Island.



Properly stored mattresses – neatly stacked and covered.

**California Mattress Surcharge:** Every mattress purchase includes a fee to fund California's mattress recycling and disposal program. The state has more than 200 permanent drop-off locations (e.g., retail stores, solid waste facilities), provides no-cost load pick-ups, and pays for collection of discarded mattresses.

## Carpet

Carpets are difficult to handle and recycle, as they are made of a variety of materials including nylons, polypropylene, and polyester. The backing and padding are commonly disposed of with the carpet.

### Processing Carpet

- ✓ Collect and store carpet separately.
- ✓ Check with your local waste management company for disposal requirements. Sometimes carpet can be placed on top of waste headed to a landfill.
- ✓ Check for established state carpet collection and recycling programs. Visit the [Carpet America Recovery Effort's \(CARE\) website](#) to locate a carpet collection program near you.



Properly stored carpet – rolled, neatly stacked, and covered.

## Construction and Demolition (C&D) Waste

C&D waste can originate from residential and commercial sources as well as roads. Typical C&D waste includes concrete, brick, wood, masonry, roofing materials, sheetrock, siding, plaster, and metal. Managing C&D disposal can be expensive and burdensome. Consider directing contractors, other Tribal departments, and individuals to haul directly to the nearest permitted C&D landfill, rather than to discard of the waste at the transfer station.

### Processing C&D Waste

- ✓ To streamline processing, require the customer to deconstruct and sort C&D waste by type (e.g., wood, metal, concrete, drywall, asphalt, brick, and shingles).
- ✓ Some transfer stations elect to segregate and direct specific C&D materials for reuse and resale.
- ✓ Smaller transfer stations might combine C&D waste with solid waste or forward larger C&D volumes directly to partnering entities for recycling and disposal.
- ✓ If applicable, charge additional fees to cover the cost for managing C&D waste.
- ✓ Exercise care and safe lifting practices suitable for the weight and size of specific C&D waste.
- ✓ To avoid puncture wounds from metal and nails, use equipment when moving materials; wear puncture resistant gloves and eye protection; and choose footwear with protective toes and soles.
- ✓ Screen and test for potential or actual hazardous materials like asbestos and treated wood, which pose hazards to staff handling the C&D waste.
  - Treated wood is often identified by “staple” mark indentations that inject wood treatment chemicals (although wood can be treated and not have these marks).
  - Asbestos cannot be identified in the field; it must be tested in a lab for certainty. Exercise extreme caution for materials that predate the 1980s when the federal government banned materials that contained asbestos.

**Asbestos Alert:** If asbestos is suspected, wet the material with water to minimize the release of fibers, seal the material in leak tight labeled containers, and dispose of it at a landfill qualified to receive asbestos waste.

## Other Bulky Items

Some transfer stations receive other bulky items such as boats and trailers, fencing, water tanks, and drums and barrels. Before accepting bulky items, consider the cost to your transfer station to ultimately dispose of these items. Charge a fee reflective of the total cost.

- ✓ Screen drums or barrels for hazardous materials and look for labels identifying chemicals.
- ✓ Even containers that appear empty may contain hazardous levels of residuals. If hazardous materials are found, the transfer station can either reject the drum or barrel or confirm that the hazardous material is removed before sending the drum or barrel for disposal.

*Links to websites outside the EPA website are provided for the convenience of the user. Inclusion of information about a website, an organization, a product or a service does not represent endorsement or approval by EPA, nor does it represent EPA opinion, policy or guidance.*