

*Eco-tip for 6/23/19*

## **Options for Used Furniture**

By David Goldstein, VCPWA, IWMD

Bobbie Morgan, who has owned One Mo' Time consignment store for 38 years at the same location in Ventura, has seen some disturbing changes in recent years. First with clothing, and now with furniture, she has to turn away far more material than she accepts, as items are being more cheaply made.

Jeanne Bulmer, a managing partner with Rebound Stores, a furniture consignment shop serving the Conejo Valley, has noticed the same problem and has an explanation. "In my parents' generation," she said, "people kept furniture for a lifetime. Now, people completely redecorate every three or four years, as styles change," just as styles of clothing change. She blames the profusion of home improvement shows, as well as advertising, pushing people into a mentality focused on never letting not just their clothing, but also their home décor, become "out of date."

This emphasis on minor changes in style is one factor resulting in more furniture being manufactured cheaply, with particle board, and less with solid wood. The trend toward lower quality and higher turnover has been well documented for clothing. Amella Josephson, in a June 11, 2018 on-line article at [smartasset.com](http://smartasset.com), references research finding "Americans buy five times as much clothing now as we did in 1980," and as a result, we "send 10.5 million tons of clothing to landfills every year." She quips, "The U.S. is a place where the luxuries are cheap, and the necessities are expensive."

Fortunately for consignment stores selling furniture, many home decorators still care more about quality than trends. However, a steady stream of shoppers for high-quality, used furniture is not always matched by the supply of used furniture available. Transportation may be the bottleneck. To avoid the cost of workers' compensation insurance rates assigned to companies involved in moving, most consignment stores do not collect furniture from people's homes.

The solution is third party businesses who can pick up used furniture from you and deliver it to consignment stores. Moving companies such as Two Men and a Truck, hauling companies such as [Haul4Me.com](http://Haul4Me.com), and private parties available through Uber-like apps, such as BuddyTruck, Lugg, or Task Rabbit, can be contracted for transportation. In fact, some consignment stores make arrangements for this transportation after they have agreed to accept your materials. They either charge you directly for the one-way cost of moving your items from your home to their store - usually at a rate of about \$75 per hour - or, if they are certain your items will re-sell at a high enough price, the store pays the moving cost and deducts it from the sale price. Start by e-mailing pictures to a furniture consignment store, and if they are interested, they will follow up with questions about brand names and other details, such as size.

Thrift stores provide another option for reuse of furniture, although many do not handle furniture and few offer collection. One of the thrift stores providing collection, The ARC (formerly “Association for Retarded Citizens”) recently collected bags of clothing from my home but left a pre-printed message on a book case noting it was “too heavy” for them to collect. Salvation Army is another thrift store offering collection service. Call a thrift store before expecting collection or dropping off furniture; ascertain whether the store can accept it. Most importantly, never drop off without the approval of thrift store staff.

Habitat for Humanity’s ReStore also offers collection service for high-quality furniture, building materials, tools, and “gently used” items of home décor. To avoid disposal costs, they generally reject upholstered furniture and furniture made from particle board, instead preferring solid wood, leather, metal, and glass topped furniture.

Selling, or listing items as free, on on-line sales sites, such as eBay, provide access to a national buying base, but shipping is impractical for most furniture. Other sites, such as Craigslist and OfferUp, are organized by area, so shoppers see local listings first, and many can respond with a truck or van and friends or relatives to help them load purchased items.

If you cannot sell or give away used furniture through those sites, sometimes leaving an item at the curb with a “free/gratis” sign on it results in a helpful bargain hunter relieving you of a burden.

If all else fails, you can send old furniture to a landfill by contacting the hauler providing you with curbside rubbish service. Contracts and service in each of the cities are different, but as an example, the County’s contracts with companies serving residents outside cities require the haulers to provide free collections twice per calendar year for bulky items unable to fit into curbside carts. If you call your hauler and request your free annual curbside bulky item pickup, at least under the County contract, furniture is exempted from a provision allowing the hauler to charge for any item over six feet in dimension or weighing over 80 pounds.