I’ve been on the road recently and have spent lots of time in hotel rooms. At the end of my stay, I always pack up the small bottles of shampoo and soap bars and take them with me. I didn’t want to be responsible for wasting resources in case it was thrown away.

That is what usually happens, leftovers are thrown away. About 1 million partly used bars of soap are tossed out daily by U.S. hotels, according to Clean the World Foundation, a non-profit organization that recycles used soap for distribution to developing nations and homeless shelters.

Each day, 9,000 children die from diseases that can be prevented by washing with soap. The fact that any soap is thrown away is a shame when it can prevent sickness.

Recycling organizations such as Clean the World, based in Orlando, and Global Soap Project, based in Atlanta, are starting to get more attention from large hotel companies. Since its founding two years ago, Clean the World says it has distributed more than 8 million bars of soap in the U.S. and more than 40 countries, including Haiti, Japan, Zimbabwe, Uganda, India and Mexico. It estimates its efforts have diverted about 550 tons of waste from polluting landfills in the U.S. and Canada. The bars are taken to a recycling plant, where soap is sterilized and reformed into bars.

The process is simple. The soap is sterilized, then ground up and remanufactured into new bars of soap. One machine grinds the used soap down to pellets that resemble broken crayons. Then, it mixes the ground-up soap with glycerin and water, shapes the goo into a long brick, and then slices it. However, the system only works when hotels save the soap and send it to one of these remanufacturers. Locally, our chances for recycling are more limited.
If you bring that bar of soap home, you can use it as it is, or reform it into new bars. Some types of soaps can be melted in the microwave and poured into a mold. Even a recycled plastic container such as a yogurt container works to hold the soap. After it cools, pop it out and use it. Soaking it in water until the surface is jelly-like can reform other types of soap. Then push them together and you have a new bar. Not as pretty as the melted bars, but it will clean just as well.

It can also be made into hand soap. For this process, purchase a pump container that features an open mouth and wide lid. Place a few marbles, the soap pieces and a small amount of water into the pump, and then reseal the lid. The water will break down the soap and slowly mingle with the residue. Before using, gently shake the container, allowing the marbles to further break down any remaining slivers of soap. This approach makes it possible to recycle soap fragments by turning them into hand soap that is ideal for washing hands at a sink.

Those little bottles of personal care products can be used as well. I called the Fairbanks Rescue Mission and Interior Alaska Center for Nonviolent Living and found that both of them accept shampoos, lotions, and conditioners. The Center for Nonviolent Living also accepts donations of those small soap bars. I’m sure there are other organizations that accept them as well, just call your favorite charity and see who needs them. If you come home with a bunch of little bottles or bars, deliver them to one of these organizations. They’ll be glad to have them.

Soap and personal care products are necessary for daily use. If you have extra products, make sure you or someone else uses every bit of it.

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