



# Scrap Metal

**What is Scrap Metal?** Scrap metal covers anything made of metal. Most markets allow for items containing as little as 60% metal by weight to accommodate the many products made from several materials. The most common form of scrap metal are appliances and other household items, but also include car parts, machinery, building materials and others.

**How is Scrap Metal Handled?** Once collected from residents and other sources scrap metal is most commonly hauled directly to a local scrap yard. Scrap yards are typically junk yards who sell junk cars and other metals to mills or other secondary markets. A second handling option in use in NM is the contracting of an onsite baler to crush the metals where they are collected. This is advantageous for large volume collectors or when the distance to a scrap yard is too great. Mobile balers typically require a minimum volume and will pay only a fraction of market value as they must cover their operating costs.



**How Should Scrap Metal be Prepared?** The first concern related to scrap metal is the proper recovery of freon from refrigeration equipment (see next page, *Freon Recovery*). Proper handling of these gases is critical and required by law. Other than freon there are few potential hazards related to scrap metal recycling. Sorting, however, may prove a valuable investment. Many scrap yards purchase metals by type and you may find that a little sorting will more than pay for itself. However, some scrap buyers prefer mixed materials and will support this with pricing. It may seem sorting will bring in more revenue, but always keep track of the money spent on sorting to make sure it pays off.

**Where Does the Scrap Metal Go?** The American steel industry has transformed over the past few decades. Where steel once was made from mined iron ore exclusively, today more than half of domestic steel production is based on scrap. Scrap is “shredded” then separated by type prior to shipment to mills. Mills put the shredded metal directly into a furnace where it is melted and prepared in the same manner of ore based steels, whether for rods, sheets or other forms.

**Other Considerations?** While most scrap metal is environmentally benign, there are some metal products which can contain hazardous materials. The number one concern is freon in refrigeration units which is a strictly regulated air pollutant (see next page.) Other potential hazards are oils in pumps and motors, some of which may contain toxic PCB's. PCB's are most commonly found in electrical equipment manufactured before the mid 1970's, but may be found in many other products. As a toxic waste care should be taken to know the hazard and to limit potential exposure and contamination.

Information related to scrap metal recycling, including educational materials and statistics are available from the Steel Recycling Institute based in Pittsburgh, PA at [www.recycle-steel.org](http://www.recycle-steel.org)