

# Activist Spotlight

**Fact:** The Universal Recycling Symbol is in the public domain. That means it is free for anyone to use it.

## Gary Anderson and the Recycling Movement

Read about how one person took a small step that made a big difference in the recycling movement. Then, use the worksheet to make a difference in your home.



### A Simple Design Makes a Big Difference

You might not know Gary Anderson's name, but you will recognize something he created—the Universal Recycling Symbol! Anderson was a 23-year-old engineering student at the University of Southern California when he entered a competition to promote paper and cardboard as recycled materials. His simple design of three folded arrows in a triangle shape won the contest. The design became known as the Universal Recycling Symbol and was free for anyone to use.

Anderson's design helped bring attention to the growing recycling movement in the 1970s. The arrows came to symbolize the “three Rs,” or “reduce, reuse, and recycle” that serve as a slogan for the movement. Today, the Universal Recycling Symbol is printed on everything from cardboard, plastics, and aluminum to large trucks and buildings! Look for the symbol on items in your home.

### Recycling Symbols Today

People have modified Anderson's original recycling symbol over time. You may see the original symbol in different colors, or just as an imprint on plastic. Sometimes the symbol has thin arrows or is shown in a circle. One of the most important changes has been adding a number to the center of the symbol on plastic packaging. The number, from 1–7, is a code that says what kind of plastic the package is made from. Communities have different rules about how to recycle different numbered plastics. Check with your community about your local recycling rules!

# Designed to Make a Difference

**Step 1:** Take another look at Gary Anderson's design for the Universal Recycling Symbol. Think about how his design represents the important idea that he wanted people to know—that we should all reduce, reuse, and recycle.

**Step 2:** Think about your own message for how people could reduce waste and recycle. Sketch some ideas below for your own recycling symbol.

**Step 3:** Share your new design and recycling message with friends and family.

**Take it Further:** Take what you've learned about recycling and research your community's recycling rules with your family. Make a poster with:

- your new recycling symbol and message
- the types of items your community recycles and does not recycle
- the day or days of the week that recyclables are picked up in your neighborhood, or where to bring items that are not picked up

Hang up your poster in your home near where your family collects recyclables.



Share your work online. Tag us @EMKInstitute and use the hashtags #Civicsathome #EarthDay2020