

Think Recycling



FACT SHEET-1

All About Aluminium

I'm made of aluminium. You probably know there are lots of aluminium drink cans sold every year. In fact, it's five billion (ask your teacher how many 0's that is!).

Can you guess how long the line would be if all those cans were laid end to end? Well, I don't know exactly. But I do know they would stretch from John O'Groats (that's in Scotland) to Land's End (that's in Cornwall), not just once but 41 times. Why don't you look the two places up on the map and try to imagine all those cans!

Here's another fact for you to think about. The melted down recycled cans are made into blocks called ingots. Each ingot weighs 27 tonnes. If you had just one drink a day from an aluminium drink can, how long do you think it would take you to save enough cans to make one of these ingots? 20 years? 50 years? Not quite - I'll tell you - it would take 4,000 years!

Aluminium is not just used to make drink cans and food packaging, it's used to make all sorts of other things including bicycles, roller skates and scooters; trains, planes and cars; cables, window frames and greenhouses. This is because aluminium has many properties that make it suitable for a wide variety of uses.

Have you any idea where aluminium comes from? We know that metals are made from ores, which are mined from rocks. Well, aluminium is also made from an ore. It's called bauxite and is a reddish-brown colour. It's found in many countries including Australia, Jamaica and Africa.



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Do you know why it's called bauxite? Because it was first commercially mined at a place called Les Baux in Southern France.

Although aluminium is used all around us today, just over 150 years ago the metal was more precious than gold! Why was this? Because making aluminium from its raw materials was very expensive.

Then, in the middle of the 19th century, scientists made an important discovery. They found a new process that made making aluminium much cheaper.

After this, people started using aluminium more often. That's when they discovered aluminium had some pretty amazing qualities. They found out that it's:

- durable (long-lasting)
- light in weight
- strong
- a good conductor of electricity
- heat resistant
- rust-proof
- unaffected by gas or water
- easy to mould, stretch and roll

Together these properties make aluminium ideal for all sorts of products. For example a lot of car and aeroplane parts are made of aluminium because it is light, strong and doesn't rust. Because it can be rolled very thin, but stays strong and doesn't react with gas or water it is ideal for use in food and drink packaging.

