



Discarded fabric recycled into quilts for needy kids

By **MAGGIE GALEHOUSE** Copyright 2009 Houston Chronicle

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QUILTS FOR KIDS

In a national recycling program, discarded fabric finds a good use, and a schoolboy gets a quilt for his bed.

How does discarded fabric avoid the Dumpster?

In 2008, 2 tons of unwanted textiles were stitched into quilts, wheelchair bags and other items for needy kids.

“A year ago, I was approached by a group called SWIFT, the Sample Waste Initiative for Furniture and Textiles,” said Joe Stalnaker, of global recycling company Avangard Innovative, which is based in Houston. “They were concerned about fabric waste.”

Stalnaker was hesitant. Fabric wasn’t in his field of expertise. But Sue Patroliia, SWIFT’s founder, was persistent. There had to be some way to use the endless sample swatches that the furniture business churned out. And when the Quilts for Kids charity came on board a few months later, all the pieces were in place. Volunteers for the Pennsylvania-based charity were already sewing durable cotton quilts for children battling illness or abuse. Now they had a new fabric stream.

The Green Initiative For Furniture and Textiles was born.

Furniture companies including Rooms to Go and Ashley signed on. Freight company C.H. Robinson volunteered to move the fabric free. Stalnaker called his warehouse contacts and got donated space from Avangard in Houston, Sonoco Recycling in Greensboro, N.C., and Sunburst Paper in Loxley, Ala.

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So far, the Greensboro warehouse is the only one in use, but participants have big plans for the future.

“We started on the East Coast,” said Stalnaker, “because that’s where the main chapters of Quilts for Kids are. But we have more than 50 chapters of Quilts for Kids across the country. Our goal is to get to where we can designate chapter drop-off points. It’s much more environmentally friendly from a carbon-footprint standpoint.”

The cotton fabric is used to make quilts; heavier, upholstery-type fabric is used for wheelchair and bed-rail bags that can hold everything from crayons to IVs. Materials that the group cannot use go to the Salvation Army or are advertised on www.freecycle.org.

maggie.galehouse@chron.com

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