

Position paper

Recycling of used spectacles

Position statement

Each year, Sightsavers is inundated with offers of used spectacles to be recycled¹ in the developing world. Sightsavers recognises the good intentions behind these donations but accepts the advice from the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness (IAPB) that its members and other parties engaged in promoting eye health should no longer accept second-hand spectacles for the following reasons:

Reasons

Recycling spectacles is not cost-effective

For the donating country:-

- The cost of supplying used spectacles is high due to collection, transport, cleaning, sorting and storage costs. This means that in real terms they cost far more than new ready-made spectacles as well as custom spectacles made in a local facility.
- Used spectacles are unlikely to last as long as new spectacles. Replacing them would be costly to the recipient, both in financial terms and in terms of the time it would take them to reach the nearest eye-care facility. Affordable, high-quality modern spectacles are readily available and are robust.

For the receiving country:-

- There is a high cost of clearance through customs, transporting, storage, measuring and labelling powers, or knocking out the lenses so that just the frames can be reused.
- There is an expectation that donated spectacles should be given out free, but the additional cost of management and distribution has to be taken into account.
- Bulk purchase of spectacles, or the frames and lenses needed to make up spectacles, is also possible through established outlets in Africa and Asia, which brings down the price.

Everyone, regardless of their circumstances, has a right to clear, comfortable vision

- Spectacle prescriptions are usually quite complex (consisting of spherical & cylindrical powers and axis & lens centration for each eye), making it very difficult to match the prescription of used spectacles to patients' prescriptions. If used spectacles cannot be matched to a patient,² then the spectacles cannot be recycled.
- Recycled spectacles are often damaged or scratched, which makes them inappropriate for further use.

¹ Note that "recycling" in the optical industry traditionally refers to re-using spectacles in their original configuration for a 2nd patient

² Prescriptions of patient & used spectacles should match within tolerance of "International Organization for Standardization. ISO 21987:2009 Ophthalmic optics – Mounted spectacle lenses. ISO, Geneva, 1 October 2009".

Ramke J, du Toit R, Brian G. An assessment of recycled spectacles donated to a developing country. Clin Exp Ophthalmol 2006;34(7):671-6.

Everyone has a right to have spectacles that look attractive and fit comfortably

- People all over the world want to look attractive. People with refractive errors, including children, often reject second-hand spectacles because they find them cosmetically unacceptable as they can look old-fashioned or out-of-date, or spectacles designed for males are being offered to females.
- Because second-hand spectacles were prescribed for a particular individual, the frames can often be uncomfortable for another user simply because they don't fit properly, even after adjustment.

Used spectacles can cause an environmental problem

- Often massive quantities of used spectacles are collected only to be dumped as unusable, inappropriate stock - thus causing a major environmental problem in the recipient's country.

Local facilities are being supported to provide appropriate low cost high quality eye care

- Sightsavers believes that low cost high quality eye care should be available to all. There are optical workshops and public health eye care facilities in many countries providing high quality low cost modern spectacles and other eye health services. Sightsavers supports the training of a skilled workforce who are able to accurately prescribe, and reliably fit spectacles.

Sightsavers would like to thank you for the interest you have shown in our work by considering the donation of your spectacles. Please [click here](#) to find out more about the people that we help and how you can get involved.



Pair of modern, high quality, new Ready Made Spectacles
Price US \$ 2.20



Pair of modern, high quality, new Spectacle Frames
Price US \$ 1.50