

Ripple Effect # 74

Reducing Holiday Waste

The festive holiday season usually involves gatherings of families and friends, plenty of food, and often many excesses. Overflowing bins and extra bags of garbage often accompany these festivities. Unfortunately, most families create more waste than usual over the holidays and a huge part of this waste ends up in landfills.

But this season does not need to be so wasteful; if everybody makes small changes to their purchase choices and consumption patterns over the holidays, the outcome will be beneficial for the environment. The US Environmental Protection Agency offers the following tips for making this holiday season better on the environment:

- Thousands of paper and plastic shopping bags end up in landfills every year. Reduce the number of bags thrown out by bringing reusable cloth bags for holiday gift shopping. Tell store clerks you don't need a bag for small or oversized purchases.
- Show your guests where to put recyclables such as aluminum, glass, and plastic beverage containers. Wash and reuse empty glass and plastic jars, milk jugs, coffee cans, dairy tubs, and other similar containers that would otherwise get thrown away. These containers can be used to store leftovers as well as buttons, nails, or other loose items.
- Wrap gifts in recycled or reused wrapping paper or funny papers. Also remember to save or recycle used wrapping paper. Give gifts that don't require much packaging, such as concert tickets or gift certificates.
- Send recycled-content greeting cards to reduce the amount of virgin paper used during the holidays. Remember to recycle any paper cards you receive.
- About 40 percent of all battery sales occur during the holiday season. Buy rechargeable batteries to accompany your electronic gifts or consider giving a battery charger as well. Rechargeable batteries reduce the amount of potentially harmful materials thrown away, and can save money in the long run.
- Approximately 33 million live Christmas trees are sold in North America every year. After the holidays, look for ways to recycle your tree instead of sending it to a landfill. Check with your community's solid waste department and find out if they collect and mulch trees.
- Have a create-your-own-decorations party! Invite family and friends to create and use holiday decorations such as ornaments made from old greeting cards or cookie dough, garlands made from strung popcorn or cranberries, wreaths made from artificial greens and flowers, and potpourri made from kitchen spices such as cinnamon and cloves.
- Consider the durability of a product before you buy it as a gift. Cheaper, less durable items often wear out quickly, creating waste and costing you money.

- When buying gifts, check product labels to determine an item's recyclability and whether it is made from recycled materials. Buying recycled encourages manufacturers to make more recycled-content products available.

Until the next Ripple Effect,

The Red River Basin Commission (RRBC)

The RRBC is a grassroots organization that is a chartered not-for-profit corporation under the provisions of Manitoba, North Dakota, Minnesota, and South Dakota law. Our offices in Moorhead, MN and Winnipeg, MB can be reached at 218-291-0422 and 204-982-7254, or you can check out our website at www.redriverbasincommission.org

