

Reduce, Reuse, Recycle

Reduce, Reuse, Recycle – Three great ways YOU can eliminate waste and protect your environment!

Waste, and how we choose to handle it, affects our world's environment—that's YOUR environment. The environment is everything around you including the air, water, land, plants, and man-made things. And since by now you probably know that you need a healthy environment for your own health and happiness, you can understand why effective waste management is so important to YOU and everyone else. The waste we create has to be carefully controlled to be sure that it does not harm your environment and your health.

What exactly is "waste?"

Waste is anything we throw away or get rid of, that doesn't get used.

How can you help?

You can help by learning about and practicing the three R's of waste management: **Reduce, reuse, and recycle!** Practicing all three of these activities every day is not only important for a healthy environment, but it can also be fun too. So let's take a minute right now to learn more about waste and waste management, so you can become a key player in making our world a safe and healthy place.

Reduce Waste

Reduce/Reduction: to make something smaller or use less, resulting in a smaller amount of waste.

"Source reduction" is reducing waste before you purchase it, or by purchasing products that are not wasteful in their packaging or use.

A key part of waste "reduction" is "conservation"—using natural resources wisely, and using less than usual in order avoid waste.

You can practice reduction by selecting products that do not have to be added to landfills or the waste stream in general. This is really easy to do...



- **First and foremost, buy and use less!** If all the other people on the Earth used as much "stuff" as we do in the United States, there would need to be three to five times more space just to hold and sustain everybody.... WOW! So buy only what you need and use all of what you buy. Or make sure that when you are through with something, you pass it along to other people who can continue to put it to good use. This is especially important when it comes things that can be dangerous to our environment, such as paint and chemicals.
- **Start making wise "package" selections.** Why is it important to consider how something is packaged when you consider what to buy? You can reduce waste by selecting products that are not wasteful in their packaging. Flashy and fun packaging costs more, usually adds little or no value to the product, and (worst of all!) can do considerable harm to our environment by creating more

waste or waste disposal difficulties. Keep the following package-related tips in mind no matter what you are buying:

- **Pre**cycle by purchasing products in materials/packaging that can be readily recycled. So whenever you have a choice, put plain and recyclable packages high on your list to reduce packaging waste in our environment.
- Avoid single-serve containers. You can buy juice or water in large recyclable bottles or cans and then divide it up in reusable, washable containers as you need it at home or to take with you. And if you want to take juice or water with you on your [bike rides](#) or to the gym, just take it along in your own reusable sports bottle.
- Before you buy bottled water, first find out if you really even need bottled water. City water (and clean well water) is usually just as healthy, much cheaper, and may even be safer than bottled water products.
- **Refuse store bags!** When you buy one or two items at a store, carry them out in your hands; or take a reusable bag with you to carry the items you buy. And don't forget to take your old plastic and paper bags back to the grocery store for reuse or recycling. Most grocery stores have convenient paper and plastic recycling bins located near the entrance.

Hints for parents

Think BIG! Buying in "bulk" (a large amount that is not divided into separate containers) gives you the best "product to package" ratio. Many stores allow shoppers to scoop out the amount they need of bulk goods like nuts or coffee. This considerably reduces waste and packaging materials. Or you can buy in bulk by selecting bigger quantities in a single box or package—for example, buy the largest box of toothpaste, dishwasher detergent, or cereal, rather than a series of small boxes. This not only reduces the waste (from having to throw out the old containers) but it will also save you money. Packaging is expensive, so buying in larger volumes reduces the unit cost.

Buy concentrates rather than diluted products—the result is less waste for disposal when it is empty.

Use durable goods longer. Durable goods are sturdy things like furniture or household appliances that can (and should) be used for many years. You can save money and reduce waste by keeping these items longer and repairing them when they break, rather than buying new ones.

Use durable items rather than disposable items whenever possible. For example, select reusable razors rather than the disposable one that you can only use a few times and then have to throw away.

Say NO to junk mail! Call toll-free numbers in unwanted catalogs and ask to be removed from mailing lists. Whenever possible, use the Internet to obtain (and pay) bills, news, catalogs, stock reports and other information that usually comes to your house in a paper format. Reducing paper reduces waste.



Start a garden. Food that you grow yourself does not have to be "processed" or "packaged", and no fossil fuels are needed to get it to the store and then to your house.

Start a compost or [vermiculture](#) bin to transform your household garbage (food wastes, coffee grounds, etc.), into a rich earth-like material that can be added to a garden to help plants grow. Grass, leaves, paper, and some other types of food can naturally decay and turn into compost, and that compost can then be put to good use in your garden. Replace lawns with mulched gardens that are just as pretty, but are better for our environment.

Reuse



You can "reuse" materials in their original form instead of throwing them away, or pass those materials on to others who could use them too! Remember, one man's trash is another man's treasure! Here are some examples of reuse...

- Take along washable cups or travel mugs instead of disposables; a lot of restaurants and stores will be glad to fill or refill your own mug.
- When you do use disposables like plastic cups, plates, utensils, and plastic food storage bags, don't throw them away! Wash and reuse them—most of them will last for a long time with many uses. They may not cost much to replace, but it doesn't make any more sense to throw away those things than it does to throw away your bicycle after one use.

Hints for Parents

And speaking of bicycles (or other durable goods like washers, dryers, etc.), why not repair them rather than replace them when they break? This is another form of "reuse." New is not always better, nor it is always necessary. You'll be helping your environment, but your pocketbook will thank you too!

When you do decide to replace something large and "reusable," be sure to donate the old one to charitable outlets like Goodwill, Salvation Army, Habitat for Humanity, Vietnam Veterans, and the many others that are probably in your area. Most of the time the item can be repaired by those groups, and then redistributed into other homes rather than landfills.

Hold a yard sale or give-away. And ask your neighbors to join in, too—this shares the work and increases the number of unused things that can find new homes and new uses. And your local recycling/solid waste office may run a "swap shop" at recycling centers.

When you do need to purchase something, check those yard sales and charitable outlets first to see if they have what you need before selecting something new.

Use cloth gift bags and stop ripping the paper off gifts! If you remove the wrapping paper carefully, you can use it again, and there's nothing wrong with doing just that! And don't forget to use canvas or cloth bags when shopping so you don't need to make the choice between "paper or plastic."

Use washable table napkins instead of paper napkins—cloth napkins are usually much larger and more absorbent than paper products, and they can dress up your dinner table too!

New baby? Buy washable cotton diapers (look for them at yard sales or charitable outlets). Check the yellow pages to see if there is a diaper service in your area. If you select those with Velcro wraps, reusable diapers are just as convenient and may even be cheaper than disposable diapers.

Recycle

Recycle—don't just toss everything in the trash. Lots of things (like cans, bottles, paper, and cardboard) can be remade into either the same kind of thing or new products. Making new items from recycled ones also takes less energy and fewer resources than making products from brand new materials.

Just about anything in your home (or office or school, etc.) that cannot be reused CAN be recycled into something else. You'd be amazed what can be done with a recycled product! A recycled soda bottle, can be made into T-shirts, combs, or hundreds of other plastic goods that can be used for many years. Even your brand new computer case might be made from ordinary recycled plastics. And paper products can take on different forms as well; an old phone book or coloring book might become one of your school books or a notebook.

Your recycling mission is not impossible! In fact, it is very simple:
Don't throw away anything that can be recycled!

Here is a list of things you may be able to recycle

- Aluminum cans
- Cardboard
- Electronic equipment
- Glass (particularly bottles and jars)
- Magazines
- Metal
- Newspaper
- Paper
- Plastic Bags
- Plastic Bottles
- Steel Cans
- Writing/Copy Paper
- Yard Waste (leaves, grass)



Just ask your local recycling office (city, county, or state) about what can be recycled.

Now isn't that easy? There is so much that YOU can do with very little effort. And the best part is you will probably save yourself a lot of money while you are at it!

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