

## Use Less Stuff Campaign: Tips for An Environmentally-Friendly Holiday Season

December, 1999

Are you a waste-wise warrior or merely a waste-wise wannabe? Americans throw away 25% more trash during the Thanksgiving to New Year's holiday period than any other time of year. The extra waste amounts to 25 million tons of garbage, or about 1 million extra tons per week. So, to help trim the trash while trimming the tree, *The ULS Report* offers a challenging checklist of simple things you can do to reduce waste while you eat, drink, and make merry this holiday season.

### 42 WAYS TO TRIM YOUR HOLIDAY WASTELINE

#### THE ULS YULETIDE PARTY GUIDE

'Tis the season of parties and festivities, food and fun. From Thanksgiving through New Year's we like nothing more than to eat, drink and be merry, so we need successful strategies to cut down on the waste we create from our amplified entertaining.

- Turn down the heat before the guests arrive. You'll save energy while the extra body heat of your guests will warm up the room.
- For formal affairs, consider renting seldom worn party clothes or buying them from consignment shops.
- You can also rent dishes and glassware, making your party more elegant and eliminating the need to buy special holiday china.
- Walk to neighborhood parties, or carpool (with a designated driver!) with friends if it's too far to walk.
- After the party, don't throw away the leftovers! Put them in plastic containers or bags and send them home with guests, or donate to food banks.
- Plan meals wisely and practice portion control to minimize waste in the first place.

*Did you know . . . at least 28 billion pounds of edible food are wasted each year – or over 100 pounds per person. Putting one less cookie on Santa's plate will reduce his snacking by about 2 million pounds.*

#### HOME SWEET HOME

There's no place like home, especially during the holidays, so why spend so much time, energy, and money traveling when everything you need is right at home? Pretend you're a tourist visiting your own town. Call the AAA, visit your Chamber of Commerce and visit the local government website. You'll probably be amazed at the attractions you've taken for granted and never visited. Also, by staying home you can:

- Reduce the amount of gas used during a heavy travel time.
- Help keep your local economy strong, making for a vital and thriving downtown.

*Did you know . . . if each family reduced holiday gasoline consumption by one gallon (about twenty miles), we'd reduce greenhouse gas emissions by one million tons?*

#### LET YOUR FINGERS DO THE WALKING

E-commerce is the wave of the future. But remember, e-commerce is not necessarily waste-free. Choose items that won't be excessively packed for shipping. For you Web-heads, try giving these a click:

<[www.ecomall.com](http://www.ecomall.com)>, <[www.greenshopping.com](http://www.greenshopping.com)>, <[www.greenhotels.com](http://www.greenhotels.com)>, <[www.realgoods.com](http://www.realgoods.com)>.

If you're shopping by mail order catalogue, remember to cancel the ones you don't need.

*Did you know . . . in 1981 the average household received 59 mail order catalogues, and by 1991 the number had increased 140%, to 142?*

*Did you know . . . if each household canceled 10 mail-order catalogues it would reduce trash by 3.5 pounds per year? (If everybody did this, the stack of canceled catalogues would be 2,000 miles high!)*

#### BYOB

- During the nation's busiest shopping season, bring your own shopping bags. Paper, plastic and cloth are all good; the latter two can be folded easily into purses and pockets until used.
- Consolidate your purchases into one bag rather than getting a new bag at each store on your shopping rounds.

#### FUSS-FREE GIFT GIVING

- Plan your shopping in advance. Consolidating your shopping trips saves fuel (and aggravation), and you'll avoid those last minute frenzies when you won't have time to make careful gift choices.
- Rather than piling up "stuff" under the tree, think about what friends and family really want or need. Try giving gift certificates if you don't know what someone wants, or simply make a donation in his or her name to a favorite charity.

- Give gifts that encourage others to use less stuff, like a book about making crafts from reusable items, cookbook for leftovers, reusable tote bags.
- Or simply set a good example by giving homemade food or something you've made yourself from reused items.
- For kids, start a savings account or give stocks or bonds. It's fun to watch money grow and it teaches children the value of financial conservation.
- Shop for gifts at antique stores, estate sales or flea markets, since one person's trash is another's treasure.
- Donate unwanted gifts, along with last year's gifts that the kids have outgrown, to charity.

### **KID STUFF**

- When buying electronic toys and other portable items that are used regularly, remember to buy rechargeable batteries to go with them.
- Instead of wrapping gifts for the kids, hide the presents, plant clues to where they're hidden and make the kids' search into a treasure hunt.
- Get the kids to make their own tree ornaments out of things you already have around the house, or from materials they might find in the backyard: twigs, bark, flowers and herbs, pine cones, etc.
- Old clothes and jewelry make a great dress-up box for kids.
- Tools and gadgets make a great idea box for a young inventor.

### **CARD SENSE**

Our mailboxes burst this season with membership offerings and fundraising appeals, presents, gift catalogues and cards. What to do . . .

- Send e-greetings to family, friends and business associates who are on-line. (Try [The Electric Postcard](#).)
- Save yourself time, money, and hard feelings between friends – and reduce mail volume – by updating and paring down your holiday mailing list.
- Be creative. Instead of buying placemats or table decorations, make your own. Cut old cards into shapes and press between two pieces of clear contact paper.

*Did you know . . . the 2.65 billion Christmas cards sold each year in the U.S. could fill a football field 10 stories high? If we each sent one card less, we'd save 50,000 cubic yards of paper.*

### **SHOP RIGHT...AND SHIP LIGHT**

- When buying gifts you will send by mail, pick items that are easy to ship and won't require excess packaging.
- Reuse packing cartons and shipping materials such as peanuts, wood shavings, shredded newspaper and bubble wrap.
- Drop off extra packing peanuts at local private mailing centers. Call the Plastic Loosefill Council's *Peanut Hotline* at 1-800-828-2214 for the names of local businesses that reuse them. (Stores often offer discounts for returning packing materials like cartons and boxes.)

### **WRAP IT UP**

- Or better yet, think of gifts that don't have to be wrapped at all: tickets to concerts, museums, or sporting events, gift certificates, house plants, or even gifts of your own time.
- When giving oversized gifts like bicycles or CD racks, instead of wrapping them in paper, just tie a bow around them.
- Wrap gifts in old maps, newspapers, Sunday comics or fancy holiday gift bags. Kids' art work is a perfect wrapping for presents to proud grandparents.
- Use brown paper grocery bags to wrap small-to-medium size boxes that have to be mailed.
- Make the wrap a part of the gift: Putting cookies in a flower pot or hiding jewelry in a new pair of gloves will keep your gift under wraps and the "wrapping" out of the trash.

*Did you know . . . if every family reused just two feet of holiday ribbon, the 38,000 miles of ribbon saved could tie a bow around the entire planet?*

### **CHOOSE TO REUSE**

- Get a tree that can be planted or mulched afterward, or buy an artificial one.
- Compost your food waste. Fruits and vegetables and their peels, pits and seeds are all perfect for composting – a great natural fertilizer.