

The Daily Union

Saturday, December 17, 2016

Title: An Eco-Friendly Holiday

The holiday season is full of lights, laughter, fun, and festivities. Gifts are purchased and boxed then often wrapped in beautiful paper, ribbons, and bows with various amounts of gift-wrapping tape. If not wrapped, they are usually placed in a gift bag stuffed with decorative tissue to keep the contents hidden. The gifts rest under an artificial or real tree, waiting for the moment when the paper, ribbons, bags and bows are pulled away to the side and the gifts are revealed to their receivers.

As the gifts disappear from under the tree, the pile of discarded paper, boxes, bags, and bows forms a pile to be wrestled with later in the day. It's no wonder that during the holiday season, we generate over 25% more waste than usual – equating to about 1 million extra tons of waste in the United States from Thanksgiving thru Christmas!

The mission of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is to protect human health and the environment. One way each of us can contribute to that same mission is to make recycling a priority throughout the year, especially during the holiday season when the amount of waste generated explodes!

The symbol for recycling promoted by EPA and other organizations is a triangle formed from three areas of focus – reduce, recycle, and reuse. There are opportunities for recycling in each of these areas during the holiday season.

REDUCE:

One of the best ways to manage waste is to not produce it in the first place. You can reduce the amount of waste during the holiday season by giving gifts that require little or no packaging, such as the gift of time, making a donation, or giving tickets to a special event.

Use your *TIME* to prepare a fresh or freezer meal for friends or family. They can enjoy their holiday time by not spending time in the kitchen with their own food preparation. I know of very few college students who don't appreciate a home cooked meal to take back to their apartment or dorm refrigerator to enjoy after they return to campus in January. My mom is widowed and struggles preparing single serving meals. The "extras" from my home cooked meals can become a care package for her to have during these cold winter months when she is less likely to get outdoors.

DONATIONS can take on many different forms. I have a friend whose family puts cards on their Christmas tree for each family member. Inside the card is a note sharing that they made a donation to a charitable organization in honor of their family member. For example, one of the adult children in the family was adopted through a non-profit

agency. A donation to that agency was given by my friend in honor of their adopted child.

Another donation option would be to contribute food to our local Geary County Food Pantry. They are in great need of shelf stable foods for the clients they work with. Whole grain cereal, canned fruits, vegetables, meats and soups, rice or pasta mixes would all be welcome donations at the Food Pantry. To find more information about the Food Pantry, go to www.LiveWellGearyCounty.org and click on the "Food Access Resource Guide" found under the Resources tab. Donating food is a great way to share the gifts of the season with others.

Giving *TICKETS* to a local event is another great way to reduce waste during the holiday season. Tickets don't have to be boxed and wrapped and can simply be placed in a recycled envelop to pass on to the person you are gifting them, too. The C.L. Hoover Opera House and B&B Theatres Junction City Gem both have a great line up for folks of all ages. Go to <http://www.jcoperahouse.org/> or <http://www.bbtheatres.com/junction-city-gem/> to find out what the upcoming programs are and buy tickets for your family or friends.

RECYCLE:

If you are celebrating during this holiday season, it is likely there will be food involved – large amounts of food. Planning ahead can help you use your leftovers after the large meals for subsequent use in other dishes. Reusing your leftovers saves money, too.

Avoid using disposable dishes and utensils at your meals. If you must use them, buy them made from recycled or compostable material. Make sure you have well-marked recycle containers so that your friends and family know where to put the recyclable cans, bottles, and paper products.

When sending or giving cards or stationary, look for paper with the highest percentage of post-consumer recycled content. Or make your own card from paper you'd normally throw away. If you have leftover gift wrap, you can cut out decorative portions of the paper to glue on to a homemade card to add a special touch.

REUSE:

Use unique wrapping materials to embellish your wrapped gifts. Reuse maps, the Sunday comic strips, or posters. Wrap gifts without a box. Remember to save the ribbons, bows, and bags to reuse next year.

If you want to celebrate with a live tree, you need to explore options on how you can recycle the undecorated tree after the season is over. **Chuck Otte offers some specific ideas on what you can do with your tree after the holidays.** See his article, also in this section, for more information.

In wishing you the best the season has to offer, I hope you find ways to reduce, recycle, and reuse during the season and throughout the year. Until next time, keep living resourcefully!

OPTIONAL GRAPHIC: (referred to paragraph 4)



Graphic Source: <http://www.homeatyourfingertips.eu>