

A Quarterly Newsletter Of



Solid Waste District of  
LaPorte County

(219) 326-0014  
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www.solidwastedistrict.com

Fall 2004



## What's the fuss about fall leaves?

The way some people act, you'd think that fall leaves were poisonous. These folks rush out to remove the leaves from the lawn and shortly thereafter haul them from the property, either by pulling giant bags to the curb or driving them off to the drop-off center.

However, fall leaves aren't the enemy. In fact, these leaves can be friends to your lawn, garden, and soil, recycling this year's summer beauty for the good of next year's healthy plants.

Don't send your fall leaves away. Instead, use them in your yard. Here are some of the ways to put leaves to good use:

- Use your mulching mower to shred the leaves onto your lawn. The small leaf parts will decompose by spring, but, in the meantime, they will pro-

tect your grass roots from harsh temperatures and provide some valuable nutrients to your lawn. If you don't have a mulching mower, you can simply remove the bagger attachment on your mower and insert the chute cover (a safety device that covers the hole where the bagger normally attaches).

- Rake a layer of leaves onto your garden or into your flower beds. Or, pick up leaves with your bagging lawn mower and put these shredded leaves in a layer onto gardens and flower beds. Whether the leaves are whole or shredded, the layer should be no more than 2 to 3 inches thick. These leaves will serve as a mulch, protecting helpful insects, bacteria, and fungi from the cold and keeping

moisture in the soil for your spring plants. In the spring, aerate the soil by mixing the decomposing leaves into it.

- Compost your fall leaves. You can add whole leaves to your pile or bin, but shredded leaves will compost more quickly. To shred leaves, use a lawn mower or a chipper/shredder, a piece of equipment that can be rented or shared with neighbors. Mix the fall leaves with "green" waste, such as fruit and vegetable scraps, grass clippings, or garden plants. You can compost in a backyard pile or bin. Just remember to keep the pile moist (not soaking wet) and to turn or stir the materials occasionally. The compost is finished when the mixture looks like soil.

## Buried in fall leaves?

Sometimes, the end of the growing season brings more plant waste, leaves, and brush than you can mulch or compost. Never fear—help is available!

The Solid Waste District of LaPorte County's Yard Waste Drop-off Site is located at the north end of Zigler Road, just past the grandstands on the west side. (Zigler Road runs along the east side of the LaPorte County Fairgrounds.) The site is open during daylight hours, seven days a week.

You can drop off leaves, grass clippings, yard trimmings, branches and brush, as well as chipped wood and clean, non-treated lumber. You may drop off materials in special kraft paper leaf bags, which may be purchased at local grocery and hardware stores. You must unload your own material at the site.

If material is transported to the site in plastic bags, the plastic bags **MUST** BE emptied. You **MUST** take your plastic bags away from the site.

## A little leaf fun

Fall leaves don't have to be all work and no play. Take a break from the serious work of raking, mowing, shredding, mulching, and composting to enjoy them before they're gone for the year.

- Learn why leaves change color. Visit the library, ask a science teacher, or search on the Internet.
- Preserve fall leaves to be enjoyed during the winter. Put leaves between sheets of wax paper and flatten them under a pile of books. They will probably need to dry for close to two weeks.
- Look for "Gathering Leaves" by Robert Frost. (Check collections of his poetry at the library or a used

bookstore.) This delightful poem refers to leaf bags "as light as balloons" and wonders aloud when this fall "harvest" will stop.

- Rake leaves into a tall pile. Jump in it. If you feel silly, get some children to jump with you. Take individual or group pictures of heads popping from the leaf pile or leaves being tossed overhead.
- Create an autumn leaves scrapbook. Identify the leaves—it will help you learn more about local and regional trees.
- Remember leaf rubbings? Make some this fall. All you need are leaves, paper, and crayons or colored pencils.



## What about leaf burning?

Fond memories of the "old days" aside, leaf burning is not the proper way to handle your fall leaves.

Leaf burning releases many pollutants into the air—smoke from just five pounds of burning leaves creates a full pound of pollution. Leaf burning can create health hazards for children, the elderly, and people with breathing difficulties. Burning can also put nearby properties at risk.

## Last mobile collection for household hazardous waste coming up

Our final mobile household hazardous waste collection will be held from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Saturday, October 16 at the LaPorte County Fairgrounds. Household hazardous waste is accepted only during these hours.

You and your family will be able to drop off a variety of household products, such as cleaners, automotive fluids, oil-based paints and stains, pesticides, waste fuels, and mercury-contain-

ing items. Because of the chemicals they contain, these products cannot be disposed with household trash.

Remember—latex paint is **NOT** hazardous, so it cannot be dropped off at these mobile collections. Dry it out, remove the lid from the can, and place it with your household trash for disposal.

For details, call Tom Buford at 1-800-946-4449 or 219-326-1425.

## Compost available

The yard waste we collect is composted. This compost is available on a first-come, first-served basis to LaPorte County residents at these self-serve locations during daylight hours:

- Fish Lake — Fish Lake Community Building (Old Lions Club property), on 800 East
- Hanna — County Highway Barns
- Hudson Lake — Hudson Township Park
- Kankakee/Rolling Prairie — County Highway Barns, corner of 700 E. and 400 N.
- Kingsford Heights — Grayton Road on left (cement slab by sewage

plant)

- LaCrosse — Owego and Dominic Streets
  - LaPorte — City Street Department, 1206 Second Street
  - Michigan City — Hitchcock Street
  - Union Mills — Mill Pond, off Water Street
  - Wanatah — At sewer plant, 12562 S. 1050 W.
  - Westville — Prairie Meadow Park
- Wondering how we make this compost? See our website, [www.solidwastedistrict.com](http://www.solidwastedistrict.com), to read an article about and see photos of our Westville Compost Facility.

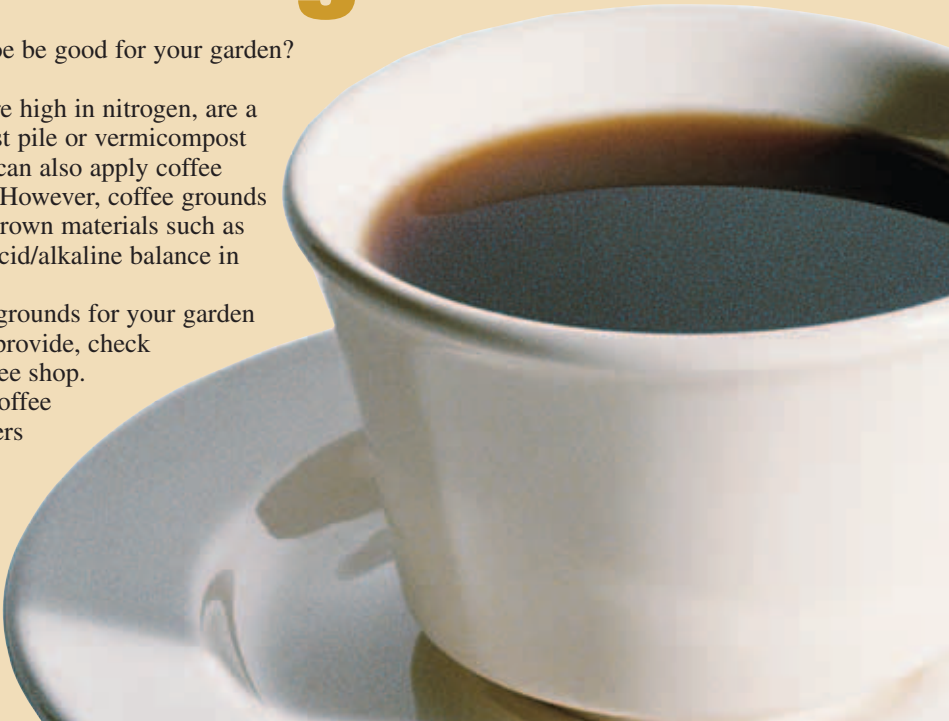
# Grounds for gardeners

Could your morning cup of joe be good for your garden? The answer is YES!

Coffee grounds, which are high in nitrogen, are a good addition to your compost pile or vermicompost (worm composting) bin. You can also apply coffee grounds directly to your soil. However, coffee grounds are acidic so mix them with brown materials such as fall leaves to keep a healthy acid/alkaline balance in your soil.

If you want more coffee grounds for your garden than your own daily pot will provide, check with a local restaurant or coffee shop. Many are already providing coffee grounds to gardeners and others may be willing to do so. For instance, Starbucks stores nationwide provide grounds to residents who request them through the "Grounds for Your Garden" program.

Don't forget—you can compost your paper coffee filters, too!



# Go to the source

Whether you're a researcher, an interested citizen, a teacher, or a student, there are many great books and other resources to help you learn more about reducing, reusing, recycling, and buying recycled. By reading more about these topics, you will see what a difference you can make with your choices and actions. Plus, you'll be excited to share your newfound knowledge with your friends, family, neighbors, co-workers, classmates, and others.

Search for resources at the local library or try to find them at used bookstores. Here are some book lists that will get you started:

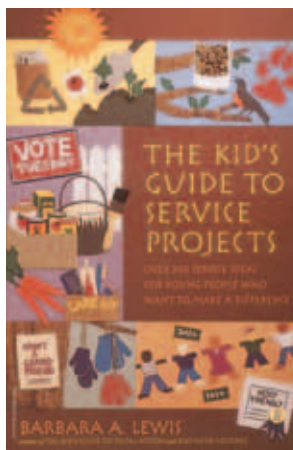
- America Recycles Day Suggested Readings on Recycling, Garbage, Composting, Vermiculture (worm composting), and the Environment: [www.americarecyclesday.org](http://www.americarecyclesday.org) (click on "Suggested Reading")
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's site for Teachers and Students: [www.epa.gov/epahome/students.htm](http://www.epa.gov/epahome/students.htm)
- An Annotated Bibliography of Children's Literature with Environmental Themes: [www.teachers.net/archive/envirobks.html](http://www.teachers.net/archive/envirobks.html)
- National Association for Humane and Environmental Education List of Best Books: [www.nahee.org/awards/best\\_books.asp](http://www.nahee.org/awards/best_books.asp)
- Outdoor Book Reviews, a Guide to Outdoor Literature: [www.ronwatters.com/BkMain.htm](http://www.ronwatters.com/BkMain.htm)

Here's a great way to spread the word to others. Compile your own list of favorites about the environment. Visit the library and write down the call letters and numbers for each of these books or other resources. Back at your computer, create an easy-to-read bookmark with the titles and library information. These bookmarks would even make good holiday card inserts or gift tags.

## Are there children in your life?

Do they know that they can help make our world a better place? This fall, students are talking a lot about voting and elections. Even though they aren't yet old enough to vote, there are still many things that they can do to improve our communities and the environment. Check out these books:

- *The Kid's Guide to Service Projects: Over 500 Service Ideas for Young People Who Want to Make a Difference* by Barbara A. Lewis (Free Spirit Publishing, 1995)
- *The Complete Guide to Service Learning: Proven, Practical Ways to Engage Students in Civic Responsibility, Academic Curriculum, & Social Action* by Cathryn Berger Kaye (Free Spirit Publishing, 2003)



# Thinning down

In recent years, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency estimates that 15.5 million tons of container and packaging waste have been prevented by manufacturers' redesign efforts. As a result, in the past decades, some of your favorite containers have lost weight:

- In 1972, there were 21.75 aluminum cans in a pound. Today, there are 32 cans per pound.
- Non-returnable glass containers are 44 percent lighter today than they were in the early 1970s.
- In 1977, a 2-liter bottle weighed about 2.4 ounces. Today, it weighs only 1.8 ounces.
- The average 1-gallon milk jug weighs 30 percent less than it did 20 years ago.

# Give me the good news first

Today, Americans are recycling between one-quarter and one-third of the trash they generate. Some regions of the United States have much higher rates than others. And, of course, in states with disposal bans on specific materials or deposits on items such as beverage containers, rates for those materials are much higher than the national averages.

Enjoying the highest national recycling rates are lead-acid batteries at 94 percent, corrugated boxes at 70 percent, newspaper at 60 percent, steel cans and packaging at almost 59 percent, yard waste at about 57 percent, and both large appliances (often called "white goods") and office papers at 55 percent. Other products continue to see growth in their recycling rates, including magazines and tires.

The news when it comes to beverage containers is less good. Soft drink and water bottles (made from #1 PETE plastic) are only being recycled at a rate of about 36 percent, down from a high of 46 percent a decade ago. Milk jugs and detergent bottles (made from #2 HDPE plastic) have also seen a drop in their recycling rate, to 28 percent from a high of just over 30 percent. However, even as the proportion of recycled to discarded containers has dropped, the weight of the recycled plastic has continued to grow because more of these containers are being used.

Glass containers have also seen a drop in recycling—both in terms of percentage and total weight. The current rate is around 22 percent, down from a high of 27 percent.

The most distressing trend, however, concerns aluminum beverage containers. Nationwide, the recycling rate for aluminum cans peaked in 1992 at 65 percent. As of 2003, that rate had dropped to only 44 percent. The Container Recycling Institute estimates that Americans are now failing to recycle more than 50 billion recyclable



aluminum cans each year. If you stacked these cans end-to-end, they would circle the Earth 153 times!

Aluminum should be one of recycling's greatest success stories. It does not degrade during the recycling process and can be endlessly recycled back into the same product. In fact, an aluminum can used and recycled today could be melted, remanufactured, refilled, and back on store shelves within six weeks! Aluminum recycling also requires as much as 95 percent less energy and creates 75 percent less pollution than making new aluminum from bauxite ore.

Meanwhile, Americans are under the impression that they are still recycling aluminum cans at the same rate they did in the early 1990s. A study by Alcan, an aluminum can recycler, found that 70 percent of Americans say they always or often recycle aluminum cans. One of the reasons many Americans may be overestimating their recycling is that they are still recycling all or most of their cans at home. However, more beverages than ever—including those in aluminum cans—are being consumed and trashed away from home while people are on the go.

Sources: "The State of Garbage in America" by BioCycle magazine and the Earth Engineering Center of Columbia University; "Municipal Solid Waste in the United States" by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and Franklin Associates, and the Container Recycling Institute.

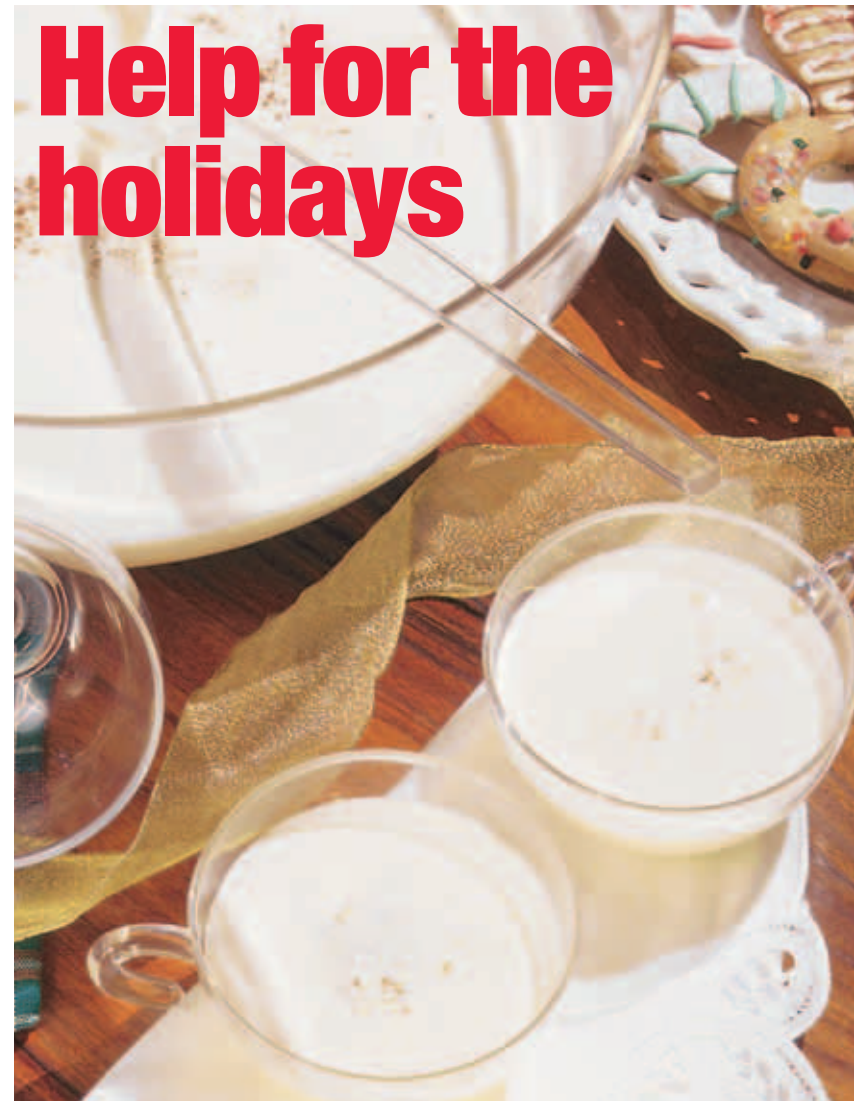
## Quick tips to eliminate waste

At work or school, creating less trash is easy. At least, it is if you take these simple steps:

- Use both sides of paper.
- Use scrap paper and envelopes for messages.
- Reuse rubber bands, paper clips, and other fasteners.
- Use e-mail whenever possible.
- Create electronic folders to save needed e-mails, rather than printing them out and filing them.
- Refill or buy remanufactured ink jet and laser toner cartridges.
- Keep everyone in-the-loop by posting information on a bulletin board.
- Share magazines with friends.
- Carry your own refillable mug or cup.
- Pack a waste-free lunch in a reusable bag or box with washable containers and a cloth napkin.



# Help for the holidays



As the holiday season approaches, you are probably already planning trips and parties. Beginning in November and continuing through January, many people travel, visit relatives, eat big meals, prepare special foods, and give more than a few gifts.

Because of this, the holiday season is often also the waste season. It doesn't have to be. Here are some tips to help you have a less wasteful—and more relaxing two months.

**Party Planning** — Know how many people are coming to each event you're hosting and plan the food accordingly. If you have more leftovers than your family can finish, send food home with your guests. Avoid disposable decorations, dishes, cups, and napkins. Instead, reuse old family decorations, your own dishes, glasses, and cups, and reusable, cloth napkins. If you don't have cloth napkins, maybe this would be a good time to invest in some. They are inexpensive and can be reused year after year.

**Travel** — Road trips often include disposable food packaging and recyclable drink containers that end up in roadside trash cans. If you're traveling by car, pack snacks (and even lunch) in your own washable, reusable containers. You can put them into a cooler with drinks from home. When you get to your destination, wash your containers. They'll be ready to repack for the trip home. Look for roadside recycling containers, which are available at some rest stops. If you don't find them, put your recyclable aluminum, glass, and plastic beverage cans and bottles into a bag or box and recycle them when you get home or to your destination.

# What (really) matters

This is a great time of year to discuss what really matters most to you. During this season of giving, learn what your family and friends really need. You might find that they could use more of your time and attention. Time and attention don't cost money and almost always create significantly less waste than giving them a lot of stuff.

Here are some sample resolutions for your family or friends:

- We will schedule time for unscheduled fun each week. During our free time, we will find a fun activity that all can take part in, such as playing a game, taking a "moon hike" outdoors in the evening, working on a puzzle, creating a scav-

**Gift Giving** — Make a list of everyone to whom you'll give a gift this holiday season. After making the list, decide the total amount you want to spend on gifts. Now, decide what you would like to give. One budget-conscious and waste-reducing way to give gifts is to shop for gently-used books and other items at secondhand and antique stores. Another way is to give of yourself, such as offering to babysit for young children or drive an elderly person to the store. You also might consider giving to a good cause in honor of someone on the list; you can make a card describing the group that has received money or goods in their name. Framed photos make a wonderful gift—you might even be able to make a frame or find a unique used frame. If you choose to buy new gifts, look for items such as jewelry or handmade stationery made from recyclables.

**Gift Wrapping** — Reuse wrapping paper, gift bags, ribbon, and tags from past years. If you don't have any on hand, make your own wrapping paper by decorating the blank side of brown paper grocery bags, reusing colored sections of newspaper, old maps, or children's artwork, or using fabric, shelf paper, or wallpaper scraps. In other words, begin with items that you already have on hand! Or, "wrap" the gift in a basket or canvas bag that will be reusable later. If you buy wrapping paper, look for paper with recycled-content.

**Holiday Greetings** — Think about the holiday greetings that your family most enjoys—they are probably the cards or letters that include newsy notes and fun photos. Consider making your own holiday greeting postcard or letter this year. Of course, print it on recycled-content paper and mail it in recycled-content envelopes. Or, e-mail paperless greetings instead.

enger hunt, making a craft project, or cooking.

- We will devote more of our time to helping each other. For instance, kids can help parents wash the car, do the dishes, or fold the laundry. The whole family can help elderly relatives, neighbors, or friends with a big project around the house or yard. Parents can commit to spending an hour doing an activity of the children's choice.
- We will volunteer our time to make our community a better place. There are many opportunities for whole families to volunteer. On a regular basis (monthly, quarterly, etc.), we will do something to improve our local environment or help someone in need.

## WHAT'S UP?

Residents will be able to drop off **tires and white goods (large appliances)** for recycling. The event will be held on Saturday, October 16 at the LaPorte County Fairgrounds from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Gates close at 2 p.m. and rules are strictly enforced.

There is no charge to drop off up to 10 tires of any size and large appliances, such as washers, dryers, stoves, refrigerators, air conditioners, freezers, humidifiers, and water heaters. Freon will be extracted from refrigerator appliances at no charge.

Any tire load over 10 tires requires a call to Susan at the office (326-0014 or 1-800-483-7700). You will be added to our list. Those NOT on the list will be turned away on the day of the collection. In addition, driver's license and vehicle registration must be presented to the officer at the collection prior to dropping off tires.

The District reserves the right to refuse any loads. This drop-off event is for residents ONLY. No businesses or industries may drop off items.



**We want your suggestions, questions and comments!**

We are also available to speak to your club or organization about solid waste, waste reduction, recycling and composting.

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[www.solidwastedistrict.com](http://www.solidwastedistrict.com)

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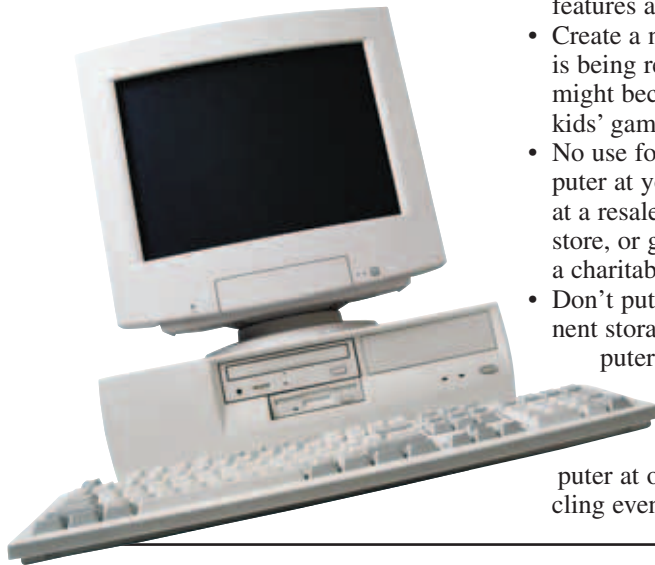


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# Extending the usefulness of your computer

Creating a new desktop computer consumes 529 pounds of fossil fuels, 48.5 pounds of chemicals, and 3,300 pounds of water—all for a machine that weighs less than 100 pounds. When that computer reaches the end of its life, it leaves behind pounds of metals, such as mercury, lead, and cadmium, and many chemicals that shouldn't end up in landfills.

Because computers require so many



resources and create so much potentially hazardous waste at the end of their lives, it makes sense that we keep and use them for as long as possible. Here are some ways to extend the life of your computer:

- Upgrade the system by adding memory, processors, drives, or components.
- Repair broken equipment by replacing damaged parts.
- Install up-to-date software to get the features and functions that you need.
- Create a new use for a computer that is being replaced. For instance, it might become a computer for the kids' games.
- No use for a working, retired computer at your office or home? Sell it at a resale shop, computer reuse store, or garage sale. Or, donate it to a charitable organization or school.
- Don't put an old computer in permanent storage. The longer the computer sits in storage, the less useful it is to you or anyone else.
  - Recycle your old computer at our next electronics recycling event, which will be held dur-

ing the summer of 2005.

Read more about computers and their impact on the environment at [www.it-environment.org](http://www.it-environment.org). Or, look for the book *Computers and the Environment: Understanding and Managing Their Impacts*, edited by Ruediger Kuehr and Eric Williams (Kluwer Academic Publishers, Eco-Efficiency in Industry and Science Series).

## Bulky is better

The last time you were at the grocery store, how much did you spend? Ten percent of that bill paid for packaging. And that packaging, none of which was edible and most of which wasn't reusable, in turn constituted about 12 percent of your household garbage. Fortunately, more than a third of this type of packaging is being recycled each year.

However, whether your packaging went into a trash can or a recycling bin, it's yours—bought and paid for. Would you like to save money on your next grocery bill? Reduce the amount of packaging that you buy:

- Plan ahead and make a list. Will you be eating at home a lot in the coming week? Will someone in your family be traveling? Based on who will be eating and what meals will need to be prepared, purchase food only for those meals and snacks. Don't stock up on perishables if no one will be home to eat them.
- Choose the quantity of fruits and vegetables that suits your family. Rather than buying pre-packaged quantities, count the items that you need. If you have a single item, don't put it into a plastic bag. If you have a bunch of items that will be peeled for use, such as bananas, you also don't need a bag.
- Check out the store's bulk buy area. If you find items that are on your list, select the quantity you need in this area.
- Compare the price per unit of products—buying in bulk usually provides a cheaper product per unit or per serving. For instance, compare the per-ounce price of applesauce in single-serve disposable plastic cups with that of applesauce in a large recyclable jar. In addition to eliminating the extra waste from the cups and the paperboard holder, you'll probably also find that the applesauce in the jar is a lot cheaper.
- Buy non-perishables in the largest possible container. Laundry detergent won't "go bad," so buy a large container. You'll get less package per unit of product.
- Purchase concentrated products and refills. Again, you get less package per unit of usable product.
- Take your own grocery bags to the store. Reuse grocery store bags that you have at home. Or, use canvas or string bags. It's easy to keep them in the car for use.

## What is "waste reduction"?

The three R's begin with "reduce," but what does that mean? What is "waste reduction"?

Waste reduction is what we don't use or waste—by choice. It is the waste that we choose to prevent when we buy only what we need, select products with less packaging, leave our grass clippings on the lawn, or refill containers.

When we practice waste reduction, we don't create any waste that must be recycled, composted, or disposed. In fact, we create no waste at all.

Maybe we should call it "waste elimination."



You've seen the "Give 'em a brake" signs encouraging you to slow down in road construction zones. You know what the flashing lights on a school bus mean. But what happens when you see a trash or recycling truck at the side of the road?

For too many people, the answer is to race the engine and speed around, without paying attention to where workers are located or what they might be doing. As a result, there are many near misses and several serious accidents each year, a few of which involve fatalities.

That's how the "Slow Down to Get

Around" campaign was born. About a year ago, a trash collector was seriously injured and another killed in roadside accidents involving inattentive and careless driving. Both worked for Rumpke Waste Corporation of Ohio. After the accidents, Rumpke and its truck supplier, McNeilus Truck and Manufacturing, developed a campaign to raise awareness about the risks facing workers whose jobs keep them at the roadsides and in harm's way. The message of the campaign is that drivers need to pay better attention and slow down to get around stopped or slow-moving vehicles—for everyone's safety.

When you see a trash or recycling truck stopped or slowed, don't hurry up. Instead, sit up and pay attention. Use caution. Avoid accidents. Protect those who must work in the streets to do their jobs and yourself—*slow down to get around!*

The National Solid Wastes Management Association, a trade association for the refuse industry, picked up the Slow Down to Get Around campaign and is helping promote it nationwide.

The campaign materials include television and radio commercials that can be customized with the logo of the local sponsor.

In addition to trash and recycling companies, other types of businesses,

including pizza, postal, and other delivery services, utility companies, and street departments, are also welcome to use the promotional materials, placards, and commercials.

For more information about this effort or to order materials, visit [www.rumpke.com/slowdown.html](http://www.rumpke.com/slowdown.html), [www.mcneiluscompanies.com/company/safety\\_campaign.cfm](http://www.mcneiluscompanies.com/company/safety_campaign.cfm), or [www.envasns.org/](http://www.envasns.org/).