

## Special Holiday Edition

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How can we balance the fun, excitement and traditions of the holiday season with ways to lessen the impact we have on the environment over the holidays?

Many of us would welcome less emphasis on gift-giving, shopping, over-spending and decorating, and more emphasis on appreciating family and friends.

This special edition of 'the green scene' offers suggestions on how to make the holiday season more fulfilling and relaxing while lessening the burden on the environment.

### Holiday Statistics

- Approximately *six million tons* of EXTRA waste are generated between Thanksgiving and New Year's in the United States. (L.A. County of Public Works)
- According to the American Express Retail Index, in 1999, the average holiday gift budget was \$1088, up 16% from 1998.
- According to the American Bankers Association, it takes an average of 4 months for a credit card user to pay off holiday bills.

"And he puzzled three hours, till  
his puzzler was sore.

Then the Grinch thought of  
something he hadn't before!  
'Maybe Christmas,' he thought,  
'doesn't come from a store.  
Maybe Christmas, perhaps,  
means a little bit more!'"

- How The Grinch Stole Christmas  
by Dr. Seuss

### Wrapping Presents

Reduce the amount of wrapping paper you purchase and throw away each season:

- Wrap the box instead of the present - wrapped boxes can be reused for years.
- Decorative gift bags can also be reused.
- Wrap gifts in newspaper comics, old maps, fabric, craft paper or paper bags that can be decorated.
- Be creative!- wrap themed gifts inside each other- for example, wrap kitchen items in a tablecloth or apron, or bath items in a towel, and tie it with a ribbon!
- Purchase wrapping paper made from recycled-content paper.
- Reuse as much wrapping paper as possible, and be sure to recycle wrapping paper, tissue paper and cards. (note: metallic and coated papers cannot be recycled)
- Reuse ribbons and bows- most cannot be recycled.
- If you have to ship presents in the mail, use popcorn instead of foam peanuts and include a note explaining that the birds can eat it. You can also purchase biodegradable starch packing peanuts.
- Reuse cardboard boxes for shipping as many times as possible, and recycle them when you are finished.

### Holiday Cards

- Send e-cards instead of paper ones this year! (save paper and postage)
- If you are going to send paper cards, purchase ones that are made from recycled-content paper and include a note to recycle the card after the holidays.

### Creative Gift Ideas

According to a recent poll by The Center for the New American Dream, 85% of Americans think we should use this holiday season to focus on friends, family and meaning.

Give thoughtful gifts this holiday season:

- Create a family collage or scrap book with photographs, drawings, and other meaningful items.

- Give a gift of your time- make coupons for activities like dinner, a movie or a weekend trip, or for services like babysitting.
- Give a gift of your talents- knit a scarf, make a painting, take photographs.
- Give a gift of teaching someone how to ballroom dance, can fruits, knit, or watercolor.
- Give a membership to a museum, environmental or other nonprofit organization.
- Holiday baking is a gift that will never go to waste and is always appreciated!
- Antiques and collectibles make excellent gifts and are environmentally friendly because they are recycled!
- Plants make excellent presents and last longer than most gifts. Herb-growing kits or seeds for next spring's garden are also great ideas.
- For presents that require batteries, purchase rechargeable batteries and chargers instead of disposable ones.
- Look for gifts with a minimal amount of packaging material.

### Shopping

- Take canvas tote bags along on your shopping trip to the mall or the grocery store to avoid plastic and paper bags.
- Remember that every trip to the mall or grocery store requires more gas for your vehicle. Make lists in advance and do all of your shopping in as few trips as possible. (this can also reduce stress!)

## Holiday Decorating

- If a tree is part of your celebration, buy a live one that can be replanted in your yard. If you can't replant your tree, compost it after the holidays along with wreaths and other live decorations. See below:

Pittsburgh tree recycling program:

The city has many drop-off locations for yard debris, including Christmas trees, which are open year round.

Drop-off locations are:

- Heth's Run: lower Zoo parking lot, off Baker St. at Butler St.
- 3rd Division Sub-station: Melanchton Ave., off the 5200 block of 2nd Ave. in Hazelwood
- 5th Division: Hassler St., off Herschel St. next to Herschel Field in the West End off Steuben St.
- 1st Division: off Grand Ave. off Brighton Rd., in lower Riverview Park, Northside.

- Environmental Services Building: 3001 Railroad St. off 30th St. in the Strip

Drop-offs are open year round Monday thru Friday from 8am to 2pm (except Holidays) For more information, see [www.city.pittsburgh.pa.us/pw/html/drop-off\\_information.html](http://www.city.pittsburgh.pa.us/pw/html/drop-off_information.html)

- Consider buying an artificial tree that can be reused every year. Remember, you'll save a live tree for every year that you reuse your artificial tree!
- Instead of discarding your poinsettia once it has faded, prune it back severely and place it in a shady place. Allow it to dry out. Start watering again in May and the plant should be ready for the next holiday season.
- Buy good quality decorations that will last. Store them carefully after Christmas for use the following year.

## Holiday Food

- Use reusable plates, cups and silverware instead of disposable ones.
- Recycle all beverage containers, bottles, food cans and clean aluminum foil from your holiday gathering.
- Give home-baked goodies in reusable holiday tins instead of on disposable plates.

## Holiday Lighting

When decorating during the holidays with strings of lights, most people use standard incandescent (C-7) lights or mini-lights. These use a significant amount of energy and regularly involve bulb replacement. It often seems easier and cheaper to throw away a string of lights and buy a new one rather than buy replacement bulbs and figure out which bulbs are burned out.

Light Emitting Diode (LED) holiday lights have a number of benefits over conventional lighting.

- Replacing standard holiday lights with LED lights reduces energy use by 99%.
- LED lights have a longer life span (up to 100,000 hours used indoors, and half that outdoors). Also, the manufacturer provides a 5-year warranty.
- Additional safety- there is no chance of combustion from the cool temperature bulbs.
- Sturdier bulbs- the epoxy lenses are virtually indestructible.

LED lights are currently available in 50- and 100-bulb strings with red, green and yellow bulbs. Blue and white strings are expected out soon.

source: Washington State University Cooperative Extension Energy Program Factsheet 2001

## Saving Energy Saves Money

- Put your holiday lights on a timer and set a schedule so that they don't use unnecessary electricity.
- Turn down the heat just before your guests arrive. The body heat alone is enough to keep the room comfortable.
- Wait to run the dishwasher until you have a full load to save water and energy.

## Reduce Excess Catalogs

In 1998, the weight of catalogs and other bulk mailings in the U.S. municipal solid waste stream was *5.2 million tons*. It requires 88.4 million trees to produce that much paper. And, only 18.9% of bulk mail was recycled in 1998.

(data compiled by The Center for a New American Dream from the U.S. Postal Service, Advertising Mail Marketing Association, Direct Marketing Association, Consumer Research Institute, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency)

- Call the toll-free numbers on the back of excess catalogs and have your name taken off the mailing list.

information for this issue has been compiled from the following sources:

The Center for the New American Dream [www.newdream.org/](http://www.newdream.org/)

North Carolina Division of Pollution Prevention and Environmental Assistance (DPPEA)

University of Oregon Campus Recycling Program

L.A. County Department of Public Works' Environmental Defenders Program

Washington State University Cooperative Extension Energy Program