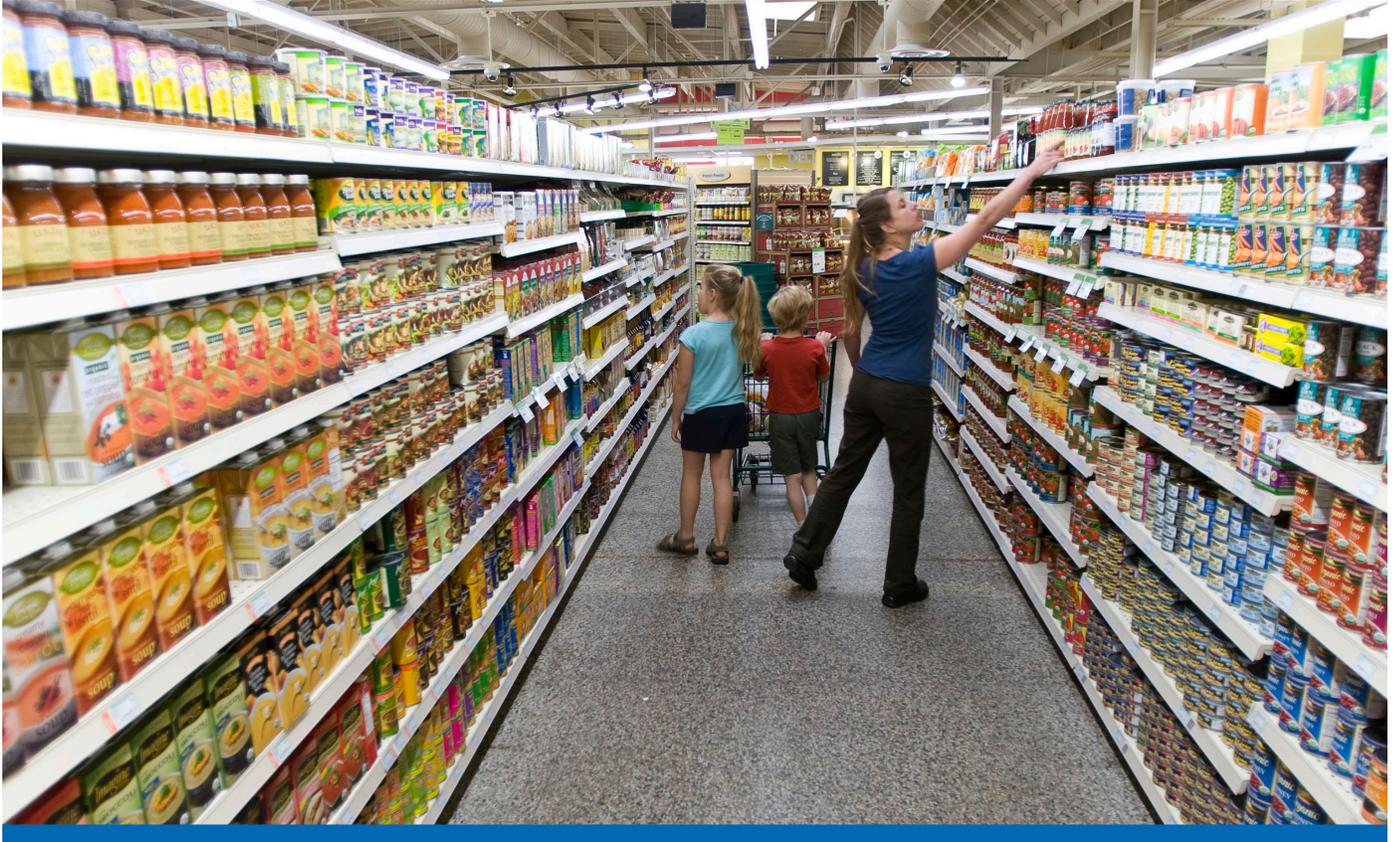


Reducing waste



More than one million tons of garbage is generated in Hennepin County every year. From packaging and junk mail to excess paint and food scraps – it takes a lot of time and money to deal with all of that waste. Waste reduction is any method used by a consumer or producer of a product to reduce the amount of solid waste that will require recycling, composting, incineration or disposal. In other words, if something is never created or you don't buy it, you don't have to decide how to reuse it or dispose of it.

When considering the hierarchy of waste management, preventing waste is the best thing we can do to protect the environment, even before reuse and recycling. From choosing not to buy a product, learning to repair an item, buying used, or using reusables, we can prevent waste in a lot of ways.

Rethinking what we buy

When you go shopping, you probably aren't thinking, "I'll buy some garbage today." But depending on which products you choose, that might be what you're doing. By purchasing items that are overly packaged, disposable, or of poor quality, your cash can soon end up as trash.

Every product manufactured impacts the planet. Manufacturing products requires resources and contributes to pollution. Waste prevention involves changing consumption habits and production methods to conserve resources.

When we must buy, we can reduce the environmental impact by purchasing durable and made-to-last products, looking for products with recycled content, choosing to reuse products instead of buying new, and selecting products with minimal packaging.

Durable versus disposal products

How durable or disposable a product is will determine its longevity and environmental impact.

Durable products include clothing, furniture and tools. These products are designed to be used over and over again, and we can maintain and repair them to ensure longer product life. Only at the end of their useful lives do durable products wind up in the solid waste stream. How well a product is made and maintained determines how soon it will need to be discarded and replaced with a new product.

Disposable products include items like paper or plastic dishes and utensils, non-rechargeable batteries, and personal-hygiene products. Disposable products are designed and produced to be used only once and then discarded. Hospital supply products, such as disposable syringes and gloves, were among the first disposables to appear on the market. They were promoted as being more sanitary than their durable counterparts, and their use is almost universally accepted as a health care standard. Eventually, the use of disposables expanded from hospitals into homes. Disposable home products are more often touted for their convenience rather than hygiene. They were originally intended to serve as backups to durables, not as substitutes. Paper towels, for example, could capture the occasional big spill. In most homes today, paper towels have replaced their reusable cloth predecessor. Likewise, disposable diapers were initially intended for use during travel. Now many parents use disposables all the time. Gradually, these and other disposable products have all but replaced their durable counterparts.

Product obsolescence

A much subtler form of disposability is durable products that have been designed for obsolescence. There is quite a difference between an item that is truly worn out and one that is obsolete only because it was poorly made, is out of fashion, or has been upstaged by an "improved" version with "new and exciting" features. Planned obsolescence is now common in many industries, most notably clothing, sporting equipment, home interiors, automobiles and electronics.

Although design and marketing for obsolescence increases sales for manufacturers, it has the ultimate and unsustainable effect of turning otherwise durable products into quickly replaced and then disposed of commodities. Planned product obsolescence contributes to our waste problem and increases consumption of energy and natural resources. We can change it by rethinking what we purchase and considering what we really need.

Packaging

Products are not the only waste-generating goods. Product packaging constitutes a large portion of the household waste stream and is a significant contributor to roadside litter. Containers and packaging make up more than 30 percent of the U.S. municipal solid waste stream.

Packaging has different purposes and functions, some of which are critical while others are not. Packaging may be used for product protection, identification and marketing, or convenience.

Glass, paper, plastic, aluminum, steel and wood are commonly used packaging materials. Some packaging, such as metal cans, glass bottles and jars, boxes, and plastics bottles, cups and containers, are relatively easy to recycle. Other packaging, such as plastic bags and wrap, foil and Styrofoam™, are not easily recyclable and often end up in the trash.

Making smarter purchases

Many external influences, such as marketing and product manufacturing, shape our purchasing habits and discourage waste reduction. Becoming aware of these influences is a necessary first step in changing our behavior.

We live in a society where the old saying, “use it up, wear it out, make do, or do without” has been replaced by marketing strategies that encourage impulse buying, and people often make purchasing decisions with little prior thought or planning. As a result, we may buy products that aren’t as useful as we had thought, and these purchases become clutter and eventually waste.

Pre-cycling is a three-step process that encourages waste-reduction purchasing by considering our purchases before we make them.

Pre-cycling involves:

1. Decide what you need

Before making a purchase, consider:

- Why do I want this?
- How often will I use it?
- What are my alternatives to this product?
- Can I get along without it?
- What will I give up (e.g., time, money) in order to buy this?

2. Consider alternatives to buying new

- Could you purchase used, rent, borrow, repair or repurpose an item instead of buying new?

3. Select the best product and package

If purchasing new is the best option, employ selective shopping by considering:

- Will this product last?
- Is it made with sustainable materials and manufacturing processes?
- Is it repairable?
- Is it a classic? Will I be happy with it years from now?
- What will happen to it at the end of its life? Can it be recycled or composted?
- Is the product free of unnecessary packaging? Is the package refillable or recyclable?

Ten ways to reduce waste

1. **Use reusables.** Bring a reusable mug with you to the coffee shop, use a refillable water bottle and use a reusable bag everywhere you go shopping – not just at the grocery store, but retail, clothing, hardware stores and more! Pack a no-waste lunch by using a reusable lunch box or bag and reusable containers instead of plastic bags or disposable containers. Don’t forget to use cloth napkins and reusable silverware.
2. **Borrow, rent and shop used first.** Before you run to the store to buy a new item, think about how much you will use it. Could you borrow one from a friend or neighbor, rent it at a local store or purchase it used? Items to consider borrowing or renting include ladders, party supplies, yard care and camping equipment, library books and more. Items to buy used include kitchenware, appliances, clothing, furniture, toys, musical instruments, and sports and camping equipment.
3. **Buy well, buy once.** Well-designed and constructed products that are repairable will last longer and usually save you money, even if they cost more initially. Consider buying cloth diapers, refillable razors, refillable pens, cloth napkins, towels and rags, cast-iron pots and pans, covered food containers, travel mugs and rechargeable batteries. Think about resisting trends and fashions and consider your purchases an investment.
4. **Maintain and repair** your household items, such as shoes, clothing, appliances, electronics, furniture, tools and automobiles. Learn repair skills and get help fixing your items at a Hennepin County Fix-It Clinic (www.hennepin.us/fixitclinic).
5. **Sell, give away or donate** usable clothing and household goods. Donate reusable items to a local thrift store or charitable organization, hold a rummage or yard sale or resell items online. Check the Choose to Reuse Directory (www.hennepin.us/choosetoreuse) for options.
6. **Reduce food waste.** Organic waste, which includes food waste and food-soiled paper, makes up about 30 percent of our trash. You can reduce food waste by using up what the food you already have, planning your menu and grocery shopping, freezing or preserving

the food you cannot use up right away, and composting fruit and vegetable scraps, coffee grounds, plant trimmings and more in a backyard compost bin or participating in an organics recycling collection program.

- 7. Minimize packaging and avoid disposables.** At the grocery store, buy in bulk and bring bags or containers to fill. Choose products with the least packaging over individually wrapped items. Check out Hennepin County's Packaging Waste Reduction Learning Trunk at www.hennepin.us/environmentaleducation for hands-on educational resources on reducing packaging waste..
- 8. Get your name off of junk mail lists.** The average household receives as much as 60 pounds of unwanted mail every year. See the Hold the Mail handout to find ways to get off junk mail lists to reduce the amount of unwanted mail you receive.
- 9. Green your celebrations.** From Thanksgiving to New Years, household waste increases 25 percent. The additional food waste, packaging, wrapping paper and decorations adds up to one million tons of garbage a week nationwide. Green your celebrations by using reusable serviceware, meal planning to reduce food waste, providing recycling for your guests and giving green gifts. Avoid over-packaged, resource-consuming gifts that will need batteries or electricity. Consider making a gift, sharing an experience, providing a service or giving an environmentally friendly product. Check out Hennepin County's Green Your Parties Learning Trunk at www.hennepin.us/environmentaleducation for hands-on educational resources to aide in greening your celebrations.
- 10. Find creative ways to reuse items,** such as making note pads from scrap paper, repurposing glass jars or plastic tubs into canisters, relabeling envelopes and more!



WHAT ARE YOU PAYING FOR?

Packaging makes up about 30 percent of our trash. Some packaging, including paper, boxes and plastic packaging from toys and electronics, is recyclable. However, a lot of packaging, including plastic bags and wrap, foil, and Styrofoam, is not easily recyclable.

A lot of products are available in small portions that have a lot of packaging. These products, while claiming to increase convenience, also greatly increase the cost of the product. For example, individually packaged, snack-sized bags of potato chips cost about twice as much as buying the same amount of chips in a larger bag. Choosing products with minimal packaging saves money and reduces the amount of waste produced.

Outcome

Participants will learn the economic and environmental costs of purchasing overly packaged food and drink products.

Audience

Youth (ages 8+), adults

Time

20 - 30 minutes

Concepts

- Look for less packaging and avoid disposables.
- Choose products with the least packaging over individually wrapped items.
- These choices don't just help the environment; purchasing items with less packaging saves money!

Supplies

- Examples of food and beverage items that are individually or overly packaged (snack packs, individual servings, etc.) and the same or similar products with less packaging such as bulk portions or family-size quantities. Some examples include chips, crackers, sweetened drinks, cookies, popcorn and raisins.
- Receipt from grocery shopping
- Two baskets, boxes or bags of equal size
- Paper and pens/pencils
- Calculators (*optional*)
- Examples of containers for buying and storing in bulk and packing food in reusable containers for lunches, snacks, etc. (*optional*)



WHAT ARE YOU PAYING FOR?

Preparation

Separate the examples of more packaging and less packaging into separate baskets, bags, boxes or piles. Create a chart or list of the prices you paid for the items that participants can see.

Procedure

- Ask participants how they make decisions about what they buy. Do they take taste into account? Healthfulness? Convenience? Size? Packaging? Price?
- Divide participants into small groups and distribute “less waste” and “more waste” examples of the same products to each group. Ask them to describe the differences they see. Ask them to guess the price of the different items.
- After the participants guess the costs of items, reveal the list of prices.
- Collect all the items from participants in two baskets, boxes or bags (one for “less waste” and one for “more”), or set the items into two different piles. Determine the total cost for each basket and discuss the difference in waste (for example, the “less” waste items may cost about 60 percent less than the same food and drinks in the “more” waste pile).
- If time permits, discuss buying items in bulk and packing food in reusable containers. Explain how to find the weight of the container by first weighing the empty container and how to label containers for check out.

Discussion questions

- Was anyone surprised by the difference in the prices? What did you already know about this?
- Why are some items packaged in individual containers? What price do we pay for convenience (economic, environmental)?
- What are the alternatives to buying individually wrapped containers? (Buy durables, not disposables. Use reusable containers.)
- How can you alter your lunch or snack to produce less waste?
- What are the challenges with buying food with less packaging (time, convenience, etc.)? Does anyone have experience addressing these challenges?
- Does anyone’s family buy larger portions or in bulk? Why? (Save money, reduce waste, etc.) What do you buy in bulk? Where do you get it?
- How can you make a less-packaged product more convenient? (When you need a smaller amount for a lunch or snack, take the food from the large container and place it in a smaller, reusable container.)
- Will you share information you learned with anyone else? Who will you share it with?
- What more do you want to learn about these issues?



WHAT ARE YOU PAYING FOR?

Additional activity ideas

Investigate the life cycle of products

- Have participants investigate the life cycle of a product – from the extraction of raw materials through manufacturing, use and disposal. Consider common items that may be made of numerous materials, such as a pen or permanent marker, electronics, clothing, etc.
- Have participants research the types of materials this product is made of including where the materials are sourced and how the product is manufactured. Have participants consider:
 - What materials is this product made of? Where did these materials come from? Were they mined, produced in a factory, grown on a farm?
 - How were the different materials manufactured into the product?
 - How far did the materials and/or product travel to get to the consumer?
 - What will happen to the product when we are done using it? Is the product or parts of the product recyclable?
 - Could a similar product be used that has less environmental impacts?
 - Was there any information you couldn't find or was difficult to find?

Participants can create posters or visuals to share their findings.

Grocery store detectives

- Take participants to a store and ask them to help find products that are individually or overly packaged and minimally packaged.

Ask participants to find multiple products in each of these categories:

- no wrapping (e.g. apple)
- one wrapping (e.g. bread)
- two wrappings (e.g. cereal)
- three or more (e.g. frozen meals, snack packs)
- Have participants discuss less packaging alternatives to the items they found. Which items have an less packaging alternatives? Which do not?

Design less-wasteful packaging

- Using examples from the packaging activity or any other product of interest, challenge participants to research and design packaging that would be less wasteful. Ask teams to present their packaging ideas to the entire group.

Reducing waste at your organization

- Look for ways to reduce waste within your organization, especially with groups that meet regularly as a class, team, group, etc. Considering auditing the waste generated by the group or within your organization in order to identify the best waste reduction actions. Some actions include:
 - Commit to bringing reusable mugs and bottles instead of disposal cups. Consider tracking the number of disposable cups avoided every time the group meets with a "Saved Cup Tally."
 - Serve snacks in bulk or with less packaging.
 - Use reusable foodware, including bowls, cups, plates, silverware, cups and napkins. If your organization doesn't have enough, ask participants to commit to bringing their own.
 - Reduce paper use by limiting handouts.
 - Track your progress to see how much waste the group prevents!

Resources

Tour the Hennepin County Drop-off Facility in Brooklyn Park

This tour highlights the importance of reducing, reusing, recycling and preventing pollution. Students will learn about the materials accepted at the Hennepin County Recycling Center and Transfer Station and witness what happens to the materials first-hand. They will also learn about the proper ways to dispose of and handle household hazardous waste. Available for grades 2 and older. Visit www.hennepin.us, search: tours.

Packaging Waste Reduction Learning Trunk

This learning trunk demonstrates the cost differences and packaging waste when purchasing single-serve items versus those packaged in bulk or concentrate. It also addresses packaging recyclability. Learn more at www.hennepin.us/environmentaleducation and check out the learning trunk for free by calling 612-348-4168.

ECO FASHION SHOW

Every person in the U.S. throws away an average of 70 pounds of clothing and other textiles annually. Only 15 percent of textile waste is reused or recycling, meaning 85 percent ends up in the trash. By reusing and repurposing, materials that someone no longer wants or needs can be given a new life. Reusing is an even better option than recycling because reusing doesn't require processing or manufacturing, which saves energy and resources. By shopping reuse, you can get quality, unique goods and save money.

Outcomes

- Participants will learn the value of reusing items instead of buying new.
- Participants will organize a fun event to illustrate creative reuse ideas.

Audience

Youth (ages 11+), adults

Time

Planning will take at least two weeks; actual time depends on how involved the event becomes. See Extensions for a one-day activity.

Concepts

- Before you buy a new item, think about whether you could get it used. Get creative! There are endless ideas for how you can reuse and repurpose materials into new-to-you, unique items that show off your personal style.
- By shopping used first, you can get quality, unique items and save money.

Supplies

- Reused clothes and accessories can be collected, purchased or created (see Additional activity ideas for ideas)
- Handout: Donation Opportunities Guide (*optional*)



ECO FASHION SHOW

Preparation

- Collect reused clothes and accessories by asking participants to bring in items they no longer need. Consider partnering with a local reuse outlet and giving participants a budget (if possible) to purchase items.

Procedure

- Ask participants about their favorite places to get clothes and accessories. Then ask participants if they ever wear secondhand items. What do they like or dislike about shopping reuse or wearing secondhand items? What are the challenges with shopping reuse?
- Have participants organize an Eco Fashion Show by assembling outfits from reused clothes and repurposing or altering reused clothing and accessories. Consider incorporating a theme, such as outfits inspired by famous musicians, songs, movies, cartoons, parts of the world, sports or outdoor activities, fancy party outfits, etc.
- Award prizes in categories such as “most reused materials,” “least expensive,” “most beautiful,” “most creative,” “weirdest,” etc. Prizes should be made from reused or repurposed materials or encourage reuse (reusable shopping bags, gift cards to local reuse outlets, etc.).
- Have participants develop a plan, if applicable, for advertising the show to the friends, family and the community. Consider integrating the fashion show into an existing event within your organization.

Discussion questions

- What did you learn that was new? What surprised you?
- What was the most successful part of the show? What would you do differently in the future?
- What was most fun about working with reused clothes or accessories?
- What was your favorite outside? Which outfit would you actually wear?
- What is your past experience buying used goods?
- If you are reluctant to buy used goods, what is holding you back?
- Will you buy or use more used goods after this experience? Why or why not?
- When you are done using something, what do you do with it? Where can we donate usable items we are done using? (see the Donations Opportunities brochure for ideas.)
- What do you want to learn more about?

ECO FASHION SHOW

Additional activity ideas

Make accessories from reused materials

- In addition to or instead of a fashion show, you can make smaller accessories made from reused materials. Follow these suggestions or search online for additional ideas:
 - Make bracelets from old snack bags. (<http://familyfun.go.com/crafts/snackbag-chain-bracelet-673305/>)
 - Make beads for a necklace out of old magazines or junk mail (www.wikihow.com/Make-Paper-Beads)
 - Make a purse out of old blue jeans (<http://familyfun.go.com/crafts/jean-pocket-purse-667156/>)
 - Make flower pins or headbands from fabric scraps

Research the life cycle of clothing

- Clothing serves many purposes, including function and fashion. But what do we know about the environmental impact of the clothing we wear? Ask participants to take a look at the tag on an article of clothing they are wearing. What can you learn from the tag? What is the item of clothing made of? Where was it made?

- Have participants research fabrics – what raw materials are fabrics made of and what are the environmental implications? How much textile waste is generated, and how much is reused or recycled? What are the issues with fast fashion and other clothing trends? What are the benefits and challenges of buying reused items versus new items?
- Discuss ways of reducing the environmental impact of our clothing choices (buying reused, buying classic and well-made items, looking for sustainable fabrics, etc.).

One-day eco fashion show

- Group leaders should secure reused clothes and accessories in advance of the session, or have participants bring several items of clothes or accessories.
- Have the participants assemble an outfit from the items provided and perform a spontaneous fashion show.

Resources

Handout: Donation Opportunities brochure



GIVE GREEN GIFTS

On average, Minnesotans creates six pounds of waste per person per day. From Thanksgiving to New Year's Day, residential waste increases by more than 25 percent. Additional food waste, packaging, wrapping paper and decorations add about one million extra tons per week to the nation's garbage piles. By changing the way we celebrate during holidays and throughout the year, we can also celebrate a cleaner environment. One thing you can do is make your own gift boxes and gift card holders instead of spending money on new materials that often cannot be recycled. You can also give low-waste presents by creating a homemade gift, sharing an experience or providing a service. Through these creative projects, participants can make the gifts they give both affordable and green.

Outcomes

- Participants will use alternatives to gift wrap with reused materials.
- Participants will learn ways to reduce waste during celebrations.
- Participants will get ideas for giving green gifts.

Audience

Youth (ages 5+), adults

Time

20 – 60 minutes

Concepts

- Gift wrap is generally not recyclable, but there are many alternatives for wrapping gifts in reusable materials.
- You can give green gifts by creating a homemade gift, sharing an experience or providing a service.

Supplies

- One empty box with separate top and bottom (example: shoe box), container (example: Pringles can) or empty toilet paper roll per participant
- Large, flat pieces of newspaper, old maps or posters, brown paper bags cut open, or any other reusable paper that is large enough to wrap around the container you're using
- Scissors
- Glue or tape
- Markers, crayons, colored pencils, ribbon, string or fabric for decorating the paper (*optional*)



GIVE GREEN GIFTS

Preparation

- Gather supplies for the activity in advance on your own or work with participants to brainstorm sources of used paper and collect it.
- Create a green gift box and green gift card holder in advance to become familiar with the process and make samples.

Procedure

Green gift box

- Make sure each participant has a box or container to create a green gift box.
- Have participants use scissors to cut paper, newspaper, old maps or posters to fit the size of the box or container.
- Have participants wrap the box or container with paper, newspaper, old maps or posters, using glue or tape to secure paper. Make sure participants wrap the top and bottom of the box separately so the gift can be opened and reused over and over again. Participants can secure any loose edges or corners with glue or tape.
- Have participants use markers, crayons, colored pencils, ribbon, string or fabric to decorate the outside of the box or container if desired.
- While participants are creating green gift boxes, have a discussion about alternatives to purchased and new gifts. Ask participants to brainstorm ideas for gifts that are homemade, reusable, recyclable or edible. Ideas include: baking cookies or giving ingredients to cook a treat or meal, giving an experience such as concert or movie tickets or a restaurant gift card, creating a homemade keepsake, or providing a service such as babysitting or mowing the lawn.



Example of green gift box made from a Pringles container.



Example of green gift box made from a box.

Green gift card holder

- Make sure each participant has at least one empty toilet paper roll to create a green gift card holder.
- Have participants use markers, crayons, colored pencils, ribbon, string or fabric to decorate the outside of the toilet paper roll if desired.
- Have participants fold in one half of the roll at both ends and fold the other half of the roll on top of it to enclose the roll. A crescent shape should form at both ends of the roll. Participants can re-open one end of the roll when they are ready to place a gift card inside and give it as a gift.
- While participants are creating green gift card, have a discussion about alternatives to purchased and new gifts. Ask participants to brainstorm ideas for gifts that are homemade, reusable, recyclable or edible. Ideas that could be given in the green gift holder include: gift cards, favorite recipes, an experience such as concert or movie tickets or a restaurant gift card, or a voucher for a service such as babysitting or mowing the lawn.



Start by folding one half of the toilet paper roll at both ends.



Fold the other half of the toilet paper roll to enclose it.



A crescent shape could form at both ends of the toilet paper roll to enclose it.



Completed decorated gift card holders.

GIVE GREEN GIFTS

Discussion questions

- Why do you think people use new gift wrap every year?
- What kind of difference would it make if everyone used green gift wrap?
- In addition to using green gift wrap, what else can you do around holidays or celebrations to reduce waste? (Use reusable dishes at parties instead of disposables, providing recycling options, etc.)
- Have you given a gift that was homemade, reusable, recyclable or edible before? What was the reaction to the gift?
- What other ideas do you have for giving green gifts?

Additional activity ideas

Make gift tags out of repurposed greeting cards

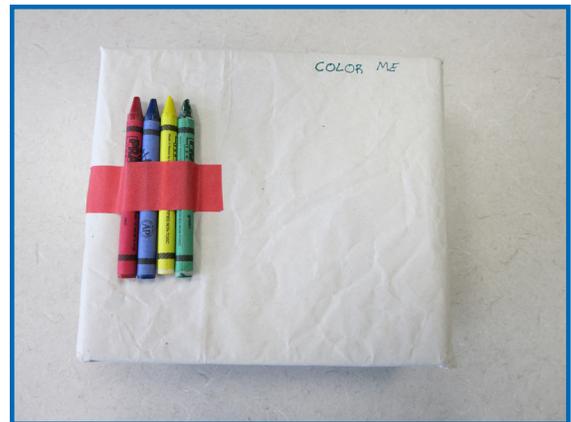
- Collect greeting cards. Using scissors, cut the greeting cards into various shapes and sizes as desired. Use a hole-punch to make a hole to tie a ribbon through and attach to gift.



Examples of gift tags made from repurposed greeting cards.

Give a coloring gift box

- Use white or light-colored packaging paper to wrap a gift box. Attach 3-5 crayons or markers to the wrapped box with tape and write a note that says, "color me before opening."



Example of a coloring gift box.

Check out the Green Parties Learning Trunk

The Green Parties Learning Trunk helps illustrate ideas for hosting greener parties and includes party supply examples for high-waste parties, low-waste parties, and parties with organics for composting as an option. The trunk also includes an engagement guide to facilitate brainstorming and planning an example party with the group. Check out a learning trunk at angela.ziobro@hennepin.us or visit www.hennepin.us/environmentaleducation

GREEN PARTY PLANNING

With all the food, packaging, decorations and giveaways, events of any size – from small gatherings to large parties – can generate a lot of waste. Many party supplies used at gatherings are used once and then thrown away. In this activity, participants will create reusable party supplies, including a pennant banner and a tablecloth, which can be used for all of their celebrations throughout the year. Participants will also review a green event checklist to assist in party planning. Whether the gathering is an upcoming holiday celebration or a birthday party, planning efforts to make and use reusable party supplies will help reduce waste.

Outcome

- Participants will learn how to reduce waste at celebrations by making reusable party supplies.
- Participants will use a green event checklist to reduce waste at celebrations and gatherings.

Audience

Youth (ages 10+), adults

Time

20 – 60 minutes

Concepts

- Parties of any size can generate a lot of waste with decorations and other party supplies, and reusable supplies can help reduce waste.
- Planning waste reduction strategies before a party can help the host throw a successful green celebration.

Supplies

- Newspapers, magazines, old maps, colored paper or fabric
- Twine or ribbon (length depends on size of pennant banner)
- Scissors
- Glue or tape
- Fabric tablecloth (one per participant, available at most party supply stores)
- Fabric paint (available at most arts and crafts stores)
- Handout: Green Party Checklist available in the Appendix (one per participant)
- Markers, crayons, colored pencils, ribbon, string or fabric for decorating (*optional*)



GREEN PARTY PLANNING

Preparation

- Gather supplies in advance or ask participants to bring their own supplies.
- Create one pennant banner and tablecloth in advance to become familiar with the process and make samples.

Procedure

Create a pennant banner

- Hand out the Green Party Checklist to participants and have them read through the list.
- Ask participants if they have considered any of the steps for previous gatherings or parties. Ask which of the steps would be easiest and hardest to follow to make a gathering or party greener.
- Have a discussion with participants about waste created from decorations and other party supplies, and ask participants to brainstorm ideas for alternatives to disposable decorations and party supplies (tablecloths, dishware, etc.)
- Have participants cut newspapers, magazines, old maps, colored paper or fabric into triangle shapes. The more triangles you have, the longer the banner will be! Encourage participants to use colors and designs that can be reused for more than one celebration so the banner can be a go-to event supply.
- Have participants fold over the top edge of the triangles about half an inch.
- Have participants glue or tape the twine or ribbon under the half inch fold and press down on the paper to secure the triangles to the banner firmly. Participants can use the scissors to snip any extra corners sticking out from the triangle.
- Have participants continue adding triangles to the twine or ribbon until the banner reaches the desired length.
- Participants can bring their banners home to use as a decoration for any event celebration.
- Make a reusable tablecloth
- Make sure each participant has a tablecloth. Have participants use fabric paint to decorate the tablecloth. Encourage participants to use colors and designs that can be reused for more than one celebration so the tablecloth can be a go-to event supply.
- Let the tablecloths dry.
- While the tablecloths are drying, hand out the Green Event Checklist to participants and have them read through the list.
- Ask participants if they have considered any of the steps for previous gatherings or parties. Ask which of the steps would be easiest and hardest to follow to make a gathering or party greener.
- Have a discussion with participants about waste created from decorations and other party supplies and ask participants to brainstorm ideas for alternatives to disposable decorations and party supplies (tablecloths, dishware, etc.)

Discussion questions

- Why do you think people use new event decorations and supplies for each party or celebration?
- What kind of difference would it make if everyone created reusable event decorations and supplies?
- In addition to using green decorations and supplies, what else can you do before and during parties or celebrations to reduce waste? (Use reusable dishes instead of disposables, providing recycling options, etc.)
- What other ideas do you have for green party decorations and supplies?

Additional activity ideas

Check out the Green Parties Learning Trunk

The Green Parties Learning Trunk helps illustrate ideas for hosting greener parties and includes party supply examples for high-waste parties, low-waste parties, and parties with organics for composting as an option.

The trunk also includes an engagement guide to facilitate brainstorming and planning an example party with the group. Check out a learning trunk at angela.ziobro@hennepin.us or visit www.hennepin.us/environmentaleducation

HOLD THE MAIL

The average American household receives more than 70 pounds of advertising mail each year. Although nearly all mail can be recycled, producing mail and delivering it to households takes natural resources and creates pollution. There are many ways to reduce the amount of junk mail you receive. This activity combines actions to reduce junk mail with creative projects to raise awareness of the issue.

Outcome

Participants will take steps to reduce the amount of unwanted mail they receive.

Audience

Youth (ages 5+) for art project, adults for reduction challenge

Time

Project can be started several weeks in advance. Allow 30 - 60 minutes or longer to create junk mail art or trees.

Concepts

- Most households receive a lot of unwanted mail.
- There are relatively simple steps you can take to reduce the amount of unwanted mail you receive.

Supplies

- Junk mail collected by participants for several weeks.
- Supplies to turn junk mail into 2-D or 3-D art, such as scissors, glue, large pieces of paper or cardboard, etc.
- Handout: Hold the Mail



HOLD THE MAIL

Preparation

- Ask participants to collect and bring in unwanted mail for a few weeks. Have participants remove personal information (name, address).
- Ask participants about the unwanted, or “junk,” mail they receive. How much do they get? Have they tried to get their name off of mailing lists in the past?
- Order or download a free Hold the Mail brochure for participants. Order online at www.hennepin.us/literatureorderform.

Procedure

Junk mail reduction challenge

- Have participants count, weigh and/or observe how much junk mail they receive in a specified time period (one or two weeks would work well).
- Review the Hold the Mail brochure with participants and discuss steps to reduce junk mail. Have participants go online to get their name off of mailing lists, or ask participants to commit to taking these actions at home.
- After a month or two (it can take up to eight weeks to see a change in the amount of junk mail received), have participants reassess the unwanted mail they receive. What types of mail were they successful at reducing? What unwanted mail are they still receiving?

Junk mail art projects

- The goal of these art projects is to make the connection that unwanted mail is made from trees, and creating mail and paper uses a lot of energy and water, so taking steps to reduce the mail we receive will protect the environment.

- Have individuals or teams of participants make a three-dimensional “junk mail tree” or a two-dimensional “junk mail tree” mural out of the junk mail they collected. Consider choosing a theme for the art, such as ripping up your junk mail and stacking it on a post to create a pine tree. Search “junk mail art” online for inspiration. Consider incorporating messages to remind people that mail (paper) comes from trees or outlining the steps people can take to reduce the amount of mail they receive. Display the art in your program space or a public space (such as a park building or community center). Consider having a “gallery opening.” Ask participants to decide how they will educate the people who see the art about how to reduce junk mail.
- Challenge youth (and their families) to take steps to reduce junk mail at home – track how many of the steps listed in Hold the Mail youth complete or how successful they are at reducing the amount of unwanted mail they receive.

Discussion questions

- Why do businesses use direct mail (junk mail) to advertise? (One reason is it is cost-effective.)
- Why are there so many steps to reduce junk mail? (Advertisers do not use just one database or mailing list.)
- Why is it important to reduce the amount of junk mail you receive? (Reduce paper waste, reduce energy used in mailing, etc.)
- What other ways can businesses advertise products and services to adults and youth?
- How easy or challenging was it to get your name off of mailing lists?
- What did you learn that was new?
- How did people respond to the junk mail art?
- Who showed leadership or was a great team member? How did they show it?
- What do you want to learn more about?

Resources

- Handout: Hold the Mail booklet
- Minnesota Pollution Control Agency’s website for tips to reduce junk mail: [www.pca.state.mn.us/index.php/living-](http://www.pca.state.mn.us/index.php/living-green/living-green-citizen/reduce-reuse-recycle/too-much-junk-mail.html)

[green/living-green-citizen/reduce-reuse-recycle/too-much-junk-mail.html](http://www.pca.state.mn.us/index.php/living-green/living-green-citizen/reduce-reuse-recycle/too-much-junk-mail.html)

CREATE OR DECORATE REUSEABLE BAGS

Between 500 billion to one trillion plastic shopping bags are used worldwide each year, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Most of these bags are used only once and thrown away, ending up in landfills or polluting land and water and damaging wildlife habitat. We can reduce plastic-bag waste by using reusable bags. Using four or five reusable bags multiple times at least once a week can replace 520 plastic bags a year.

Outcomes

Participants will learn the problem with plastic shopping bags and commit to using reusable bags.

Audience

Youth (5+), adults

Time

20 - 40 minutes

Concepts

- Plastic shopping bags, while convenient, are a waste and are generally not accepted in residential recycling programs.
- Avoid plastic bags by using reusable bags when you go shopping. Remember to bring bags with you every time you go shopping, including at the grocery store, retail and clothing stores, farmer's markets, department stores, hardware stores – everywhere!

Supplies

- Reusable bags made from canvas, cotton, recycled plastic, etc. Order reusable bags through the Hennepin County Green Partners Seed program at www.hennepin.us/greenpartners.
- Crayons, fabric markers, glue and art scraps such as yarn, ribbon or fabric.
- "Remember the bags" window clings (order online at www.hennepin.us/literatureorderform).



CREATE OR DECORATE REUSABLE SHOPPING BAGS

Preparation

Order free reusable bags to decorate and “Remember the Bags” window clings in advance at www.hennepin.us/greenpartners.

Procedure

- Discuss the use of reusable versus disposable shopping bags with participants. Do they already use reusable bags? When do they use reusable bags? Do they have any challenges with remembering to bring or using reusable bags?
- Pass out plain reusable bags and reusable art supplies and bags to participants and have participants decorate the bags.
- Distribute Remember the Bags window clings, and encourage participants to place the clings where it will prompt them to bring their bags with them when they go to the store.
- Ask participants to commit to bringing bags with them every time they go shopping. Even if they already use reusable bags, discuss ways they can increase their use of reusable bags (for example, people may use bags at the grocery store but forget about it when they are shopping for clothing). Have participants sign a commitment form to pledge to bring reusable bags with them when shopping.

Discussion questions

- Does anyone already bring reusable bags when shopping? What motivated you to start bringing reusable bags? Where did you get the bags?
- If you are not bringing a reusable bag with you when shopping, what is holding you back? How can people overcome those barriers?
- How can you remember to take reusable bags with you when you go shopping?
- How do you define reusable? What are the benefits of reusable bags?
- What are the impacts of plastic shopping bags on the environment? Consider having participants research impacts of plastic shopping bags and report back to the group.
- Why are plastic shopping bags a problem at recycling facilities? What are other options for recycling plastic bags? (Bring them to a drop-off facility or retailer take-back program)

Resources

- Handout: “Remember the bags” window cling available at www.hennepin.us/literatureorderform. See Appendix for a sample.

LITTER SONGS

Litter is still a very visible waste problem. Litter is typically packaging generated by consumers that is carelessly on the ground instead of in a recycling bin or trash bin. Littering is a completely avoidable problem – we can simply put our items into the recycling or trash bin (or reuse them)! Picking up litter is an easy way to protect land and water and to teach children about the environment.

Outcomes

Parents and children will learn about cleaning up the environment and picking up litter with songs.

Audience

Youth (ages 2+), parents and children

Time

Variable; 10 - 60 minutes

Concepts

- Littering is avoidable.
- Use songs to reinforce the idea of keeping the planet clean.
- It is easy and fun to clean up the planet.

Supplies

- Any clean items of to represent garbage or recycling
- Trash can or recycling bin



LITTER SONGS

Preparation

Adults should learn the lyrics and tune of the songs.

Procedure

- Sing the songs to children participants to get them familiar with the lyrics and tune.
- Families can sing the song and help children practice picking up items from the floor and throwing them away in the trash can or recycling bin.
- Suggested songs (courtesy of Minneapolis Early Childhood Family Education Curriculum Families for Saving the Environment by Janet Craig and Annette Gagliardi)
 1. **Litter song** —
to the tune of *London Bridge is Falling Down*
 - Let's look for litter and pick it up,
 - Pick it up, pick it up.
 - Let's look for litter and pick it up,
 - We'll help our earth stay clean.
 2. **Litter is Garbage** —
to the tune of *The Wheels on the Bus*
 - Litter is garbage that wasn't put away,
 - Wasn't put away, wasn't put away.
 - Litter is garbage that wasn't put away
 - In the garbage can.
 - I put my garbage in the garbage can,
 - In the garbage can, in the garbage can,
 - I put my garbage in the garbage can,
 - I'm not a litter bug.
 3. **There is a Planet Not So Clean** —
to the tune of *BINGO*
 - There is a planet not so clean
 - And Earth is its name-o.
 - Let's clean up the Earth
 - Let's clean up the Earth
 - Let's clean up the Earth
 - And try to save our planet.
 - There is a planet not so clean
 - And Earth is its name-o.
 - E-A-R-T-H, E-A-R-T-H, E-A-R-T-H
 - And Earth is its name-o!

Discussion questions

- Have you ever littered? Why do you think people litter?
- Will you start picking up litter more now when you see it on the ground?
- What are barriers to people putting their items into the recycling or trash bin? How can recycling and trash bins be more accessible everywhere?
- Did you find any litter that could have been recycled? How did you know it was recyclable? How will you encourage others to recycle items instead of littering or throwing them in the trash?
- Do you have other ideas for songs about the environment?

Additional activity ideas

Litter pick up for older youth

To take action to reduce litter, older youth (with adult supervision) can go outside and pick up litter around their house, school or neighborhood. Participants

should be aware of which dangerous items they shouldn't pick up and participants should wear protective gloves.

Remember to properly dispose of litter items.

MAKE TOYS FROM REUSED MATERIALS

Children often play with things that aren't sold in the toy aisle such as food containers, bottle caps, and more. Many items that we commonly consider trash can be reused as toys. Instead of wasting items like water bottles, pop bottles, milk jugs and disposable packaging, parents and children can reuse them to create toys like shaker bottles and sensory tables!

Outcomes

Parents and children will learn simple reuse ideas by creating toys from commonly trashed or recycled items.

Audience

Youth (ages 1+), parents and children

Time

30-60 minutes

Concepts

- Reuse trash or recyclables instead of throwing them away.
- Instead of buying new, make toys by reusing common household items for children's toys.
- Children's toys are typically not recyclable.

Supplies

- Empty pop bottles, water bottles, juice bottles, milk jugs or oatmeal containers.
- Clean, plastic caps from pop bottles, water bottles and/or milk jugs
- Items to put in empty bottles, such as recycled or shredded paper, small pieces of cardboard, wood chips, cut straw, plastic rings from bottles, etc.
- Hot glue or duct tape



MAKE TOYS FROM REUSED MATERIALS

Preparation

Ask parents to bring empty pop and/or water bottles from home along with clean caps from milk and juice jugs.

Procedure

Supervision for younger children is necessary when exploring small objects.

For sensory table:

- Put clean, plastic lids from containers such as water bottles, pop bottles, juice bottles or milk jugs into sensory table. Consider using other household utensils to have children grab items from the table.
- Let children sort and play with them. Children can sort items according to color, shape or size.

For shaker bottle:

- Put reused materials (pompoms, feathers, dried beans, dried rice, etc.) into bowls.
- Have parents and children put the items into pop or water bottles.
- Have parents hot glue or duct tape the caps back on the bottles to prevent children from opening the bottle.
- Shaker bottle can be used as a musical instrument for children.

Discussion questions

- Do your children enjoy playing with items that you would consider non-traditional play items? Do you already reuse any items as toys? Are there certain reused items that your children enjoy playing with? Is there anything holding you back from using reused items?
- How can you work to reduce your waste? Will you continue to use trash or recyclable items to create activities with your children?
- What other items could you use in the sensory table?
- What additional ideas do you have for creating toys from items that are typically trashed or recycled?
- How did your child respond to the sensory table and/or shaker bottles? Did they enjoy using it as much other toys?

REUSE ART PROJECTS

With a little creativity, many items that we commonly consider waste can be reused. By using commonly trashed or recycled items in art projects, you can help raise awareness about waste reduction, save money on buying art supplies and create unique masterpieces!

Outcomes

Participants will rethink items that are typically considered waste by creating art projects from trash or other reusable materials.

Audience

Youth (ages 3+), parents and children

Time

30 - 60 minutes , varies by type of art project

Concepts

- Old “trash” materials can be used to create art projects.
- You can save money while reducing waste by reusing products.
- Art can be used to spread awareness about waste reduction.

Supplies

- Recyclable art materials (old newspapers, magazines, plastic bottles, empty toilet paper or paper towel rolls, etc.)
- Trash art materials (old chip bags, pizza boxes, aluminum foil, etc.)
- Old, broken crayons
- Glue
- Scissors
- Paint (*optional*)
- Art materials such as yarn, ribbon, thread and buttons (*optional*)
- Sewing needles or sewing machine (*optional*)
- Fabric (*optional*)



REUSE ART PROJECTS

Preparation

Collect materials and consider asking participants to help you collect reusable art supplies.

Procedure

- Discuss issues related to waste reduction (refer to the background information). Have participants decide on a message you want the art to express that will encourage people to take action.
 - Allow participants to use their creativity or create a sample model of what they could create. Some ideas include:
 - Decorate an old picture frame
 - Sew old clothes into new clothes
 - Create a mural from items that can't be recycled
 - Make a snow globe using a small glass jar from jam, baby food, olives, etc. and an old small toy that can fit inside the jar. Decorate the inside of the jar with paint or glitter to look like snow.
 - Use an oatmeal container to create a holder for pencils and pens. Decorate the oatmeal container with colored paper, crayons and markers.
- Remember to not glue or tape items in ways that make them impossible to recycle later.**
- Have participants display their creations for their families and friends. Consider creating invitations to view their art with the reuse art materials.

Discussion questions

- How can art be used to spread awareness about environmental issues like waste reduction? How did people respond to the reuse art projects?
- How did the reuse art projects compare to non-reuse art projects?
- Will you continue to create reuse art projects with trash materials? Why or why not?

Additional activity ideas

Create new crayons from old, broken ones

- Peel all paper off of broken crayons
- Preheat oven to 275 degrees Fahrenheit
- Spray large or small muffin tin with cooking spray
- Fill tins with broken crayons (solid or mixed colors)
- Bake in oven for 7 to 14 minutes
- While still warm, use a toothpick to swirl colors if desired
- Cool completely, then pop out of tins

SWAP PARTY

Everyone loves new things, even when they're used. Organize a party where no one spends money and everyone leaves with gifts! Have adults and/or children look through their things and collect gently used items they no longer want. Consider a theme for the swap party, such as books, music, toys, kitchen items, clothes, shoes, jewelry, etc. Your swap party can be informal, by casually laying everything around your space and taking turns choosing items, or formal by making a game of it.

Outcomes

Participants will learn first-hand that reuse is a good way to both get rid of items you no longer want and get new-to-you items.

Audience

Youth (ages 4+), parents and children, adults

Time

30 - 60 minutes, varies by size of swap party

Concepts

- We typically have stuff we don't want any more that is still in good shape. We also like getting new stuff.
- Swap parties are a good way to get rid of stuff and get new stuff without buying new.
- Instead of shopping for new items, choose to reuse.

Supplies

- Gently used items (books, music, toys, kitchen items, clothes, shoes, jewelry, etc.)
- Computer with internet access to look at Hennepin County's Choose to Reuse Directory at www.hennepin.us/choosetoreuse (optional)



SWAP PARTY

Preparation

- Ask participants to bring gently used items to swap (remember to consider choosing a theme for the party, or create different areas at your swap for different types of items).
- Consider how your swap will work. You can have a

smaller informal swap in which items are laid out for people to take, or a larger, more formal swap with a process for how people get to select items or with items wrapped (remember to use alternative gift wrap ideas) so the swap can be more of a game.

Procedure

Small swap:

- Lay out the participants' gently used items in your space.
- Have participants take turns choosing the items they want until all items are taken.
- Decide where items that were not selected in the swap will go. Look in the Donation Opportunities brochure for options or search items on Hennepin County's Green Disposal Guide at www.hennepin.us/green-disposal-guide

Large swap:

- Lay out the participants' gently used wrapped items in your space.
- Write out consecutive numbers on small pieces of paper. Make numbers for the amount of people participating in the gift swap party (if there are 10 people participating then write out numbers 1 through 10 on small pieces of paper) and put them into a bowl, bag or hat.

- Have everyone draw a number. The number will designate the order in which guests choose a gift.
- Begin with the participant who chose the number 1. The participant will choose any gift and open it.
- Continue with the next participant. The next participant can either choose an unopened gift or they can steal an item guests have opened previously.
- Someone who has their gift stolen can either steal another gift from someone else or choose an unopened gift. A gift cannot be stolen more than once a turn.
- Continue until all participants have had a turn and a gift.
- Decide where items that were not selected in the swap will go. Look in the Donation Opportunities brochure for options or search items on Hennepin County's Green Disposal Guide at www.hennepin.us/green-disposal-guide.

Discussion questions

- Was it easy or difficult to find a reuse gift to bring to the swap party? Why do you think this was?
- What surprised you during the swap party? How did the swap party compare to a typical gift giving party?
- How does reusing items reduce waste? How can

we continue to make waste reduction a part of our everyday life?

- Did you save money when planning your swap party compares to a typical party? Why do you think this was? How can reusing items save money?

Additional activity ideas

- Incorporate a swap party into your holiday or birthday celebrations.
- Host a larger swap party for your organization and incorporate into an existing event. Consider timing the

event to correspond with a change in the seasons, before the holidays, etc. Consider incorporating a repair or mending aspect of your swap by having handy volunteers with repair or sewing skills on-hand.

Resources

- Handout: Donation Opportunities Guide available in the Appendix
- Computer with internet access to look at Hennepin County's Choose to Reuse Directory

at www.hennepin.us/choosetoreuse and the Twin Cities Free Market at www.twincitiesfreemarket.org.

- Do it Green! Minnesota's Swapping Made Easy Guide available at www.doitgreen.org.

Green event checklist

With all the food, packaging, decorations and giveaways, events of any size – from small gatherings to large parties – can generate a lot of waste. But with a little bit of planning, you can make your event low- or no-waste. The following checklist will help green your efforts before, during and after your event. Hennepin County can also help event coordinators develop waste-reduction plans, educate vendors, train volunteers and find collection options. Learn more at www.hennepin.us/eventrecycling.

Before the event

Planning:

- Select a person or committee to coordinate and implement the zero-waste efforts.
- Evaluate all materials that will be at the event (packaging, giveaways, decorations, banners), and try to eliminate as many disposable materials as possible.
- Assess the waste that will be generated to identify recycling and/or composting opportunities. If food waste makes up a significant portion of the waste generated, consider collecting food waste for composting.
- Plan to serve food items that have little or no packaging.
- Make sure to use reusable, compostable or recyclable foodservice ware and make sure to have a matching disposal method.
- Avoid use of single-serving beverages or bottled water with large beverage dispensers or jugs and filling compostable cups.
- Choose reusable linens, centerpieces, decorations, etc. If your event is held annually, plan for reuse of banners and signs, etc.
- Use decorations that can be reused in future years or consider borrowing decorations from a friend that has thrown a similar party. Consider using alternatives to balloons, such as fresh-cut flowers from your garden, or look for biodegradable balloons.
- Plan to collect plastic bags – gather plastic bags into one bag and place in recycling container.
- If you are making your own food, consider using local food, such as from a farmers market or your own backyard garden. Many local farmers can provide local food items in the wintertime. If food for your event is being catered, talk to your catering company about how they can incorporate local food into the menu.
- Provide condiments in bulk instead of individually wrapped servings. For example, provide a sugar bowl instead of individually wrapped packets.

Communication and education:

- Inform vendors of waste-diversion efforts as early as possible to ensure they have adequate time to prepare for the event.
- Inform the public about your waste-diversion efforts in social media, news releases, event programs, promotions, and advertising and registration materials.
- Consider contacting Hennepin County to schedule a recycling booth at the event. These are usually staffed by Master Recycler volunteers who provide recycling information to the public.
- Provide information on bike and transit routes to your event, or encourage your guests to carpool when possible. Consider offering to shuttle guests from transit stops to your event.
- Consider distributing invitations electronically to reduce paper waste. If you prefer paper invitations, purchase invitations made from a minimum of 30% post-consumer content recycled paper.

Waste stations:

- Plan to place recycling, composting and trash receptacles together to form a waste station. This will help ensure that materials end up in the correct container.
- Determine the number of waste stations needed. One waste station can serve between 200-300 people depending on the area of the event.
- Make sure you have access to recycling, composting and trash containers prior to the event. Hennepin County also offers free portable recycling containers to reserve for events.
- Make sure waste stations are placed in a convenient location. Place larger stations in areas where high volumes of waste are generated. Meet with maintenance staff to determine exact locations of waste stations.

- Label all containers with large, clear and specific signs. If possible, include pictures or post examples of what goes in each container. Hennepin County offers free signs for recycling containers. Be sure signs on the waste containers are visible. Also consider having banners, signs or flags to help attendees find the waste stations.

Volunteers:

- Recruit volunteers to be waste monitors. Consider using schools, scout groups, churches, businesses or Hennepin County Master Recyclers volunteers.
- Create a volunteer schedule and plan for one volunteer per waste station. You may need to plan more than one shift if the event lasts more than three hours.
- Gather waste monitor supplies for volunteers, including:
 - Plastic gloves
 - Waste pickers
 - Hand sanitizer
 - Event waste information
 - Buttons, t-shirt, etc.
 - Extra compost bags
 - Scale to weigh waste and report results

At the event:

- Greet each vendor and exhibitor during set-up and provide clear instructions for recycling their materials, such as flattening cardboard boxes for recycling, bagging plastic bags that can be recycled at drop-off locations, etc.
- Keep waste stations staffed at all times to help event participants place their waste in the correct container. If this is not possible, assign someone to check the area periodically.
- Provide a break for volunteers during their shift, if possible.
- Empty bins often, especially during the summer when odors and/or insects can discourage recycling.

After the event:

- Weigh the recycling, organics and trash separately. Calculate your diversion rate by using the following formula: $(\text{amount recycled} + \text{amount composted}) / (\text{total waste or, recycling} + \text{organics} + \text{trash})$.
- If it is not possible or practical to weigh each waste stream, weigh only the trash.
- Share your green event success with your sponsors, vendors, participants and volunteers.

Green party checklist

With all the food, packaging, decorations and giveaways, celebrations of any size – from small gatherings to large parties – can generate a lot of waste. With a little bit of planning, you can make your next party low- or no-waste. The following checklist will help green your efforts before, during and after your party.

Hennepin County can help event coordinators for larger develop waste-reduction plans, educate vendors, train volunteers and find collection options. Learn more at www.hennepin.us/eventrecycling.

Before the party

Planning:

- Evaluate all materials that will be at the party (packaging, decorations, banners, dishware), and try to eliminate as many disposable materials as possible.
- Assess the waste that will be generated to identify recycling and/or composting opportunities. If food waste makes up a significant portion of the waste generated, consider collecting food waste for composting.
- Plan to serve food items that have little or no packaging.
- Make sure to use reusable, compostable or recyclable dishware.
- Have a disposal method for your dishware (organics recycling for compostable ware, recycling for recyclable etc.)
- Use large beverage containers or jugs to fill reusable or compostable cups to avoid single-use water bottles or beverage containers.
- Choose reusable linens, centerpieces, decorations, etc.
- Use decorations that can be reused in future years or consider borrowing decorations from a friend that has thrown a similar party. Consider using alternatives to balloons, such as fresh-cut flowers from your garden.
- Plan to collect plastic bags – gather plastic bags into one bag and place in recycling container.
- If you are making your own food, consider using local food, such as from a farmers market or your own backyard garden. Many local farmers can provide local food items in the wintertime. If food for your party is being catered, talk to your catering company about how they can incorporate local food into the menu.
- Provide condiments in bulk instead of individually wrapped servings. For example, a squeeze container of ketchup, instead of individual packets.

Communication and education:

- Provide information on bike and transit routes to your party, or encourage your guests to carpool when possible.
- Consider distributing invitations electronically to reduce paper waste. If you prefer paper invitations, purchase invitations made from a minimum of 30% post-consumer content recycled paper.

Waste stations:

- Plan to place recycling, composting and trash receptacles together to form a waste station. This will help ensure that materials end up in the correct container.
- Make sure you have access to recycling, composting and trash containers prior to your party. Hennepin County also offers free portable recycling containers to reserve..
- Make sure waste stations are placed in a convenient location.
- Label all containers with large, clear and specific signs. If possible, include pictures or post examples of what goes in each container. Hennepin County offers free signs for recycling containers. Be sure signs on the waste containers are visible.

At the party:

- Empty bins often, especially during the summer when odors and/or insects can discourage recycling.