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Do More with Less

How to reduce, reuse and recycle during the holidays BY CAROLINA REID

It's that time of the year again – the holidays. And many companies are sending out one message: Buy! Consume! Waste! But Master Recycler Coordinator Kelly Bell wants you to hear a different message: Pause.

Since December 2007, Bell has worked to educate the community about ways to reduce waste throughout the year, but especially between America Recycles Day (Nov. 15) and New Year's Day. Although Lane County had the highest waste recovery rate in Oregon last year at more than 61 percent, Bell believes we can do even more. She wants people to pause and think about what is actually important during the season. Most people think of memories with loved ones, she says, not material gifts.

Not only does conventional gift-giving stress our natural resources and skew our perception of the holiday season, Bell says, it can take a toll on finances as well.

"We have become habituated to the fact that very expensive things will fail, and we accept it," Bell says

about a culture that is used to replacing expensive things far too often. Lane County Waste Reduction Specialist Sarah Grimm has a similar perception. "Our disposable society seems to pull us away from the easy, simple steps that often bring more meaning or value to our everyday life and connect us again," Grimm says. Grimm has been a Master Recycler for more than 20 years and is working with NextStep Recycling on the Repair 2 Reuse program to encourage the community to repair items before trashing or recycling them. She believes in the new message that Bell is bringing to the Waste-Free Holiday Campaign.

This campaign sends messages throughout the community via brochures and press releases about how to reduce waste during the holidays. Bell is teaming with recycling organizations in the area to help highlight examples of waste-free living that are easy for anyone in the community. These include holiday events and opportunities for alternative ways to reuse or recycle.

To reduce the impact of gift giving, the campaign is promoting gifts in a jar. Organizations like Material Exchange Center for the Community Arts (MECCA) are a perfect place to find recyclable and reusable craft supplies for projects like this. Grimm says that MECCA is also a great place for greeting cards that can be folded into small gift boxes or fabric scraps for sewing together your own gift bags. MECCA will host Create Something Day noon to 5 pm Friday, Nov. 29, at 449 Willamette St., where community members can create gifts with artists and other creative individuals at four different stations. Executive Director Heather Campbell calls this their "greener alternative to Black Friday." Campbell's favorite gift-wrapping ideas are using maps and old wallpaper, both easy to find at MECCA.

Grimm's new favorite idea is cleaning chip bags and turning them inside-out for a shiny gift bag.

But gifts aren't the only things that typically generate waste during the holidays. NextStep Recycling collects strands of Christmas lights that are often thrown into landfills, Facilities Manager Roy Nelson says. Over a three-year period at NextStep, he's seen an increase in the turnover of electronics that were purchased with a short life span during the holidays. NextStep receives electronics and many household items from residential customers and is able to fix reusable materials and resell them in their store or place many back into the community so they can get more use.

Whether you're making thoughtful gifts from reusable goods, giving an experience or donation instead of a material item as a gift or trying to repair and reuse items before wasting them, remember to pause this holiday season and consider the impact of your decisions. **GG**



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