



## Waste Reduction Hierarchy

As a consumer, the choices you make every day affect what goes in your trash can and, ultimately, what ends up at the landfill. Between the point of purchase and the point of disposal lie several options and, therefore, several decisions which must be made—do I need it, which should I buy, which is most effective, are there alternatives to disposables, do I need all this packaging, which is better for the environment, does it have to be thrown out or are there other uses for the item, can I donate or resell it. By making choices that support responsible, durable and reusable products and packaging, you can reduce the amount you send to the landfill.

Glance over the following list and pick a few activities you and your family can easily do. You'll probably find that you're already doing some of these. You'll see that what you do can make a real difference.

### 1. If You Don't Need It Don't Buy It or Use It

- \* Avoid gimmicks. Only buy a product if you really need it.
- \* If you don't need a plastic bag, don't take one. Get into the habit of bringing a bag with you when you go shopping.
- \* Rent or borrow items you use infrequently, such as power tools, ladders, slide projectors, or medical equipment.

### 2. Buy Goods and Packages That Are:

#### Reused or Reusable

- \* Inexpensive everyday cloth napkins, wiping cloths, and cloth kitchen towels are the perfect alternatives to disposable paper napkins and towels.
- \* A set of dishes and glasses purchased by your office can replace disposable cups and plates.
- \* Take a reusable mug to work to avoid using disposable cups.
- \* Buy beverages in refillable or recyclable bottles.
- \* Save your plastic containers and bags and use them again and again. They make great lunch and storage containers.
- \* Reduce or eliminate use of disposable diapers, and use cloth diapers instead.
- \* Rechargeable batteries can replace disposables.

### **Least Packaged or Bulk**

- \* Avoid buying products that are double- or triple-wrapped, such as shampoo bottles inside an extra box.
- \* Plastic bags and containers can be used again and again.
- \* Avoid aerosol cans and sprays. They spray a fine mist that can easily enter your lungs. Some aerosols may also contain chlorofluorocarbons which contribute to the destruction of the ozone layer. Besides, aerosol cans are not recyclable, and oftentimes only 50% of the actual product can be utilized.
- \* Buy dry goods such as grains, cereals, spices, flour and pasta in bulk. For items not sold in bulk, try to buy the largest size available.
- \* Buy large single containers instead of the same volume in many smaller containers (e.g., 2-liter bottles vs. six packs). Buying in bulk not only uses less total packaging, it also saves you money. For any item with a long or unlimited shelf life (e.g., laundry detergent or nonperishable foods you use regularly (such as cereals and grains) buy the biggest container you can. Put manageable amounts in reusable, smaller containers for everyday use.

### **Most Durable or Easily Repaired**

- \* Buy good quality appliances, white goods, clothes and furniture that will last many years.
- \* Car and household batteries contain heavy metals which should not end up in a landfill. When you buy a new battery at a service station, ask them to recycle the old one. For household batteries, use a battery charger to eliminate the need to discard of batteries.
- \* Select appliances with good warranties and service contracts, especially for products that are difficult to repair.

### **Least Toxic**

- \* Buy less toxic cleaning products or make your own. Many home remedies can be prepared which will save you money. Caustic and corrosive products can cause severe eye and skin damage; some are poisonous.
- \* Store clothing in cedar-lined chests or hanging wardrobes rather than using chemical moth balls.
- \* Drain cleaners are considered one of the most dangerous products used in homes. Use one of several simple homemade alternatives instead. Unclog drains with a metal snake or plunger. Or pour a handful of baking soda and a half cup of white vinegar down the drainpipe and cover tightly for one minute. The chemical reaction between the two will cause pressure in the drain and dislodge any obstructive matter. Rinse with hot water. To help prevent drain problems, pour boiling water down the drain twice a week.
- \* Eliminate hidden poisons in your home by using dry bleach or borax instead of chlorine bleach.
- \* Wipe down your stovetop with vinegar, it will be easier to keep clean.

### **3. Repair If Broken**

- \* If something can be repaired, don't throw it away.

### **4. Reuse Items Again and Again**

- \* Reuse paper and envelopes for scratch pads, message memos and notetaking.
- \* Buy used items and equipment if they will do the job as well as new items. Used items cost less and conserve the energy and raw materials used in making new products.
- \* Reuse cardboard boxes and plastic bags for storage and save packaging materials such as foam peanuts for protecting your next fragile package.
- \* When possible, bring a durable tote bag to the grocery for your purchases, or bring your grocery bags back to use again. Also, save plastic bags to reuse for produce and bulk items.

### **5. Resell or Donate**

- \* If you no longer need an item that is repairable or in good working order, donate it or sell it to someone who can use it. A notice posted at the grocery store or an ad in the newspaper will help find a buyer.
- \* You can donate, and buy, used appliances, clothing, furniture, sporting goods and other household items at charitable organizations such as Salvation Army, Goodwill Industries, and Kiwanis.
- \* Clothing you no longer need can be sold or donated. Many organizations, schools, religious institutions and theater companies gladly accept donations.
- \* Donate fabric scraps and other items for children's crafts to your local community centers, daycare centers or schools.
- \* Pass along unwanted magazines and books to hospitals, nursing homes or senior citizen centers. Many used book stores buy old books. Check the Yellow Pages under Book Dealers - Used and Rare. Many charitable organizations accept used books for reselling. Schools and libraries may also accept used books.
- \* Many towns now have used music stores that are resellers of LP's, Compact discs and tapes. They will often take your unwanted music for store credit or cash. If a compact disc is unusable, they make great drink coasters.
- \* Often software companies will send promotional floppy discs in the mail. If you don't want the software, reformat the disc and reuse it.

### **6. Recycle**

**If a product cannot be repaired, you may be able to recycle.**

- \* Recycle your glass, metal, newspapers, corrugated cardboard and appropriate plastics in your community's recycling program.
- \* Oil is a nonrenewable resource that can easily be recycled, and it's as good as new. It is cleaned, filtered and new additives are added. When a service station changes your oil, it recycles the old oil.