



Russian River Watershed Association

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RRWA Environmental Column – December 2014 Waste Reduction Tips for the Holiday Season

The holiday season is here with the accompanying shopping, decorating, gift giving, entertaining and feasting. As we celebrate, we also tend to generate lots of waste. Did you know that an extra *million tons* of waste is generated nationwide each week between Thanksgiving and New Year's? Here are a few ideas and suggestions on how to have a wonderful, gift giving holiday season and still be earth friendly.

Buy Recycled: When buying gifts, check product labels to determine an item's recyclability and whether the product and the packaging are made from recycled materials. Buy recycled-content greeting cards and wrapping paper to reduce the amount of virgin paper used during the holidays. Avoid wrapping gifts in materials that are not recyclable or reusable, such as foil or metallic papers. Make a point of cancelling catalogs you don't need.

Reduce Food Packaging Waste: Buy in bulk! When hosting a get-together, reduce the amount of individual drink containers offered, such as bottled water or soda cans, by buying beverages in bulk. Items such as individually wrapped candies, chip bags, and other snacks generate a lot of waste and bulk options are usually available.

Composting: In Sonoma County, fruit and vegetable food scraps can be put in the curbside yard debris cart for the municipal composting program. You can compost your fruit and vegetable food scraps from your holiday dinners and parties at home too.

Cooking oil: Recycle the cooking oil if you deep fry a turkey. There are locations in both Sonoma County and Mendocino County that accept clean strained cooking oil for biodiesel production.

Wrapping paper and ribbon: Recycle used wrapping paper, greeting cards, cardboard packing and other paper products in your curbside recycling cart. Foil-backed, metallic, and plastic wrapping paper *cannot* be recycled. Save ribbon to reuse on next year's packages.

Styrofoam Peanuts and Bubble Wrap Packaging: Many local packaging stores and mail centers are glad to accept these items for reuse.

Christmas trees: Christmas trees can be recycled into compost and mulch! After the holidays place your Christmas tree curbside for pick up. Think twice before purchasing a "flocked" tree - sprayed-on artificial snow can be made from environmentally harmful components and hinder the ability to recycle a Christmas tree.

Before recycling, your tree must be free of flocking, tinsel, decorations and its stand.

Electronics: *Please do not put electronic waste into your garbage can!* Under a state mandate, electronics cannot be put in the garbage.

- When purchasing a new device, ask the sales staff at the electronics store if they will take your old device back for recycling.
- Does it still work? Consider donating the device to a charity.
- In some areas, small electronic devices can be disposed of in the curbside recycling. Check with your local garbage company for more information.
- Recycle your old cell phones. State law requires that retailers selling cell phones take back used cell phones at time of purchase.

Proper Disposal of Used Batteries: *Please do not put old batteries into your garbage can!*



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- Some stores offer take-back for alkaline batteries, in addition to rechargeables. Ask the sales staff where you buy your batteries if they will take your used ones back for recycling.
- All kinds of household batteries can also be disposed of through Sonoma County's Household Toxics Program and the Mendocino County HazMobile Program.

Buy Rechargeable Batteries: About 40 percent of all battery sales occur during the holiday season. Buy rechargeable batteries to accompany your electronic gifts, and consider giving a battery charger as well. Rechargeable batteries reduce the amount of potentially harmful materials thrown away, and can save money in the long run. By law, retailers selling rechargeable batteries are required to take back used rechargeable batteries from their customers. For a list of these retailers, visit the Call2Recycle website at <http://www.call2recycle.org/>.

Holiday Lights: Brighten your holidays while saving money with LED lights. LED's use 75% less energy than conventional holiday lights and last up to 25 times longer than incandescent lighting. They also offer convenient features like dimming and automatic shut-off.

For any questions about recycling and year-round disposal options:

In Sonoma County, visit www.recyclenow.org, call the Sonoma County Eco-Desk at 565-DESK (3375), or look for your Sonoma County Recycling Guide printed in "The Real" Yellow Pages phone book under Recycling.

In Mendocino County, call the Recycling Hotline at 468-9704, visit www.mendorecycle.org or see the Mendocino County Recycling Guide available through your waste hauler or from most cities.

This article was authored by Lisa Steinman, Waste Management Specialist for the Sonoma County Waste Management Agency and Daria Isupov, staff for the Russian River Watershed Association. RRWA (www.rrwatershed.org) is an association of local public agencies in the Russian River Watershed that have come together to coordinate regional programs for clean water, fisheries restoration, and watershed enhancement.