

Remember the

5Rs:

**REDUCE
REUSE
RECYCLE
REJECT
REACT**



Developed By The Solid Waste Division
Bergen County Utilities Authority

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For more information, call the
Environmental Programs Hotline at **201-807-5825**
or visit **www.bcua.org**

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This guide is
designed to help you
make a difference
in the environment
by changing your
purchasing habits.



Environmental Programs Hotline **201-807-5825**
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REMEMBER THE 5Rs:

REDUCE the amount of waste produced. Each of us generates 3 to 5 pounds of garbage every single day. If we send less trash to landfills and incinerators, we help protect the environment.

REUSE as much as possible. Avoid disposable products. Purchase products that can be used over and over again. Reuse grocery bags, plastic bags, coffee tins, margarine containers and glass jars.

RECYCLE the recyclables! It is important to know what is recycled in your community. In order to make recycling work, we have to promote the recycling markets by buying products made from recyclable and recycled materials.

REJECT products with overpackaging or nonrecyclable packaging. Look for items with the least amount of packaging. Purchases act as "votes" for products. Select products with recyclable packaging and packaging made from recycled materials whenever possible.

REACT by calling and writing letters to store managers, manufacturers, and legislators. Your opinions count! Call the toll free 800 numbers listed on some products and voice your opinion about the product's impact on the environment. Reacting makes more of an impact than the other 4Rs.

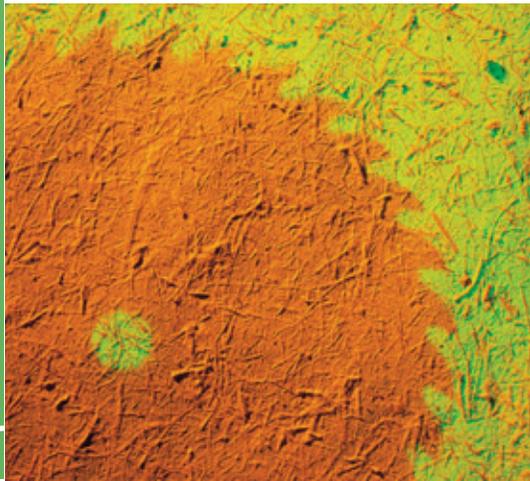
It's easy to REDUCE waste.

Borrow items you use only once in a while. Examples: specialized power tools, ladders, slide projectors, partyware.

Rental shops save you the burden of storing and maintaining equipment. Renting an item will let you know if you want one of your own and give you time to find the best one. Tool rental shops carry a wide variety of equipment, from simple hand tools to complex, expensive power tools. Other items listed for rent in the Yellow Pages: party furnishings, baby furniture, appliances, office furniture, audiovisual equipment, medical equipment, and more.

Regular maintenance and repair lengthen the useful life of products. Follow the manufacturers' instructions. They include directions for cleaning, operating and routine adjustments. Fix broken toys, small appliances, etc., instead of replacing them. If you're unsure how to do your own repairs, look for a repair manual in your library or bookstore, or check the Yellow Pages for repair services.

Use reusable items: Durable cloth, mesh, leather tote bags for any kind of shopping, coffee mugs for any time you're away from home.



EACH PERSON IN NJ GENERATES ABOUT 4.5 POUNDS OF GARBAGE A DAY. Reduce waste before it starts. Become an "environmental shopper!" **PRECYCLE!**

Precycling is the art of making waste less wasteful. It is the step BEFORE recycling — the one in which we make a conscious choice to purchase or use products which will have a less harmful effect on the environment. You can reduce your household garbage by 20% just by learning to *precycle*.

▶▶ **SELECT THE PRODUCTS YOU BUY CAREFULLY.** Consider the environmental impact of each item you purchase. Can it be repaired, reused, or recycled? Become an "environmental shopper."

▶▶ **BUY LARGE OR ECONOMY SIZE** packages of items you use regularly such as peanut butter, breakfast cereal, laundry soap, baking items, and shampoo. The larger sizes use less packaging and usually cost less to purchase per unit.

▶▶ Over 30% of our household waste comes from the packaging of products we buy. **LOOK FOR PRODUCTS WITH THE LEAST AMOUNT OF PACKAGING.** If it isn't necessary for sanitary protection, or is only used to be eye-catching, buy the product with the least packaging. It will probably cost less, too!

▶▶ Drink boxes and gable-top cartons (milk and juice cartons) are difficult to recycle. At the present time there are few strong markets for these materials in our vicinity.

▶▶ Whenever possible, **AVOID DISPOSABLE, ENVIRONMENTALLY HARMFUL, AND SINGLE USE PRODUCTS.** Buy items with recyclable packaging. Paper bags, aluminum, cardboard boxes, steel cans, glass bottles, and some

plastics are recyclable. Choose them when you shop.

▶▶ **BUY RECYCLED!** Lack of demand for recycled paper products is one of the biggest factors limiting the recycling of paper. Buy paper products such as facial tissues and paper napkins/towels that are made from recycled paper fibers. Purchase items made with recycled materials.

▶▶ **AVOID IMPULSE BUYING!** Try using a shopping list. Products bought on impulse are often unnecessary.

▶▶ **SHOP FOR DURABILITY.** Long-wearing products are often better quality products, and they create less waste than disposables. Examples of long-wearing products are silverware, cloth diapers, long-life light bulbs, electric razors and refillable lighters.

Biodegradability and product labeling

"Biodegradable," "ecosensitive," and "environmentally friendly," are all terms that make people feel good when purchasing products with those words printed on the labels. Realistically, just because a manufacturer includes such words in the description of a particular product, it does not mean that the product necessarily fulfills the environmental claim.

BIODEGRADABILITY: Scientists have found that waste which decomposes rapidly when exposed to natural elements (sun, wind, rain), will take many years to decompose underground in a landfill. Therefore, focusing on the term

“biodegradable” takes away from the real issue — our need to reduce the volume of garbage we throw away.

PRODUCT LABELING: The Federal Trade Commission has issued guidelines for the use of environmental marketing claims. The FTC believes that to make a claim about the environmental attributes of a product or package, a reasonable basis of competent and reliable scientific evidence must be possessed. The objective of these guidelines is to assure the consumer that the products displaying environmental claims meet certain standards, and at the very least, that these products are not harmful to the environment.

Tips on plastic use

You can easily identify plastics by the codes on each container. Turn the container upside down and look for a triangle formed by three arrows with a number in the center and distinguishing letters under the triangle. The number represents the recyclability of the container, and the letters represent the abbreviation for the chemical name of the plastic. Wash and reuse plastic containers and bags whenever possible. Some products are only sold packaged in plastic. When purchasing these, try to select those plastics which are recycled in your town.

Plastic Codes:



POLYETHYLENE TEREPHTHALATE: Includes soft drink bottles, salad dressing, peanut butter, popcorn, and some dry cat food containers.



HIGH DENSITY POLYETHYLENE: Includes milk jugs, trash bags, detergent and bleach bottles, aspirin bottles.



VINYL: Includes cooking oil bottles and film packaging around meat.



LOW-DENSITY POLYETHYLENE: Includes some grocery store produce bags, bread bags and food wrap.



POLYPROPYLENE: Includes yogurt containers, shampoo bottles, straws, syrup bottles and margarine tubs.



POLYSTYRENE: Often known by the trademark name, Styrofoam, includes hot beverage cups, fast food clamshell containers, meat trays and egg cartons.



OTHER: All other materials.



Reusing things saves more energy and resources than even recycling them!

It's easy to REUSE waste.

- ▶▶ Grocery shoppers use nearly 40 million bags each year. Most are used once and recycled or thrown away. Reuse **PLASTIC BAGS** for household storage, **PAPER BAGS** for recycling newspaper and cardboard (better yet, bring your own durable reusable bag to the store).
- ▶▶ **GLASS JARS** can be reused for storing foods like flour, nuts and dried fruit, or for hardware such as nails and screws, as well as for other items like buttons and plastic dinnerware.
- ▶▶ Use **WASHABLE FLATWARE, TABLEWARE AND GLASSES** for parties instead of disposable products. Wash and reuse plastic dinnerware.
- ▶▶ **PLASTIC** margarine and yogurt containers are good for short-term storage of leftovers. Plastic milk jugs work well for recycling used motor oil.
- ▶▶ **ALUMINUM** pie tins can be washed and reused.
- ▶▶ **MAGAZINES** can be given to friends, office waiting rooms, hospitals, nursing homes, etc.
- ▶▶ Reuse **POLYSTYRENE (STYROFOAM) PEANUTS** the next time you send a fragile package. Offer leftover packing material to a local gift shop or mailing service.
- ▶▶ Remove torn parts from **GIFT WRAP** and use larger leftovers for another package.
- ▶▶ Save used **DISPOSABLE CUPS** for paint touch-ups and other projects.



RECYCLE!

- ▶▶ Contact your local recycling coordinator for an updated list of **WHAT MAY BE RECYCLED IN YOUR TOWN**; encourage him/her to expand the town program. Remember, if your town does not recycle a particular packaging material, it becomes garbage!
- ▶▶ Look for **RECHARGEABLE BATTERY (NICKEL-CADMIUM) DROP-OFF** locations at retail stores in Bergen County.
- ▶▶ **CLOTH DIAPERS** are reusable and are essentially “recycled” by being used 50 – 200 times. Disposable diapers are used only once, discarded and become part of our solid waste problem. By using cloth diapers, you can reduce solid wastes and keep our landfills free of health-threatening materials.
- ▶▶ **OLD BEDDING, DRAPERIES AND CLOTHES** can be cut into pieces for rags or made into hooked rugs or decorative patchwork. Local animal shelters are always in need of blankets and sheets. And charitable organizations accept these materials for donation or resale.
- ▶▶ Remove nails and other hardware from used **LUMBER**, then use it to make birdhouses, mailboxes, or other carpentry projects. It can also be used as firewood,



if it's unpainted and not pressure-treated.

▶▶ **BROKEN CONCRETE AND BRICK** make excellent retaining walls, walkways and patios, and they can also be used for fill.

▶▶ **SCRAP PAPER** printed on one side, or **USED ENVELOPES**, can be made into a pad. Staple them together and reuse for phone messages or notes.

▶▶ Have a garage sale or donate unwanted **HOUSEWARES, HOME FURNISHINGS, OFFICE SUPPLIES, AND MORE** to charitable causes. Some donations may be tax-deductible. Shop at garage sales and thrift shops to save money and give new life to someone else's discards.

▶▶ Donate **USED CARS** no matter their condition to your favorite charity. Call or look on-line to find out how to do it.

▶▶ **FOOD** —

▲ Eat leftovers instead of throwing them away, as long as they're safe.

▲ Some charitable organizations "rescue" usable food that would otherwise be discarded from places like restaurants, markets, and cafeterias, and distribute it to needy people.

▲ Composting recycles waste foods into rich soil. Find out how to do it on-line or at your local library.

What else can you do?

Make an effort to understand environmental issues in order to make intelligent choices.

▶▶ Nothing lasts forever. Ask yourself some questions before shopping. Is it reliable? How long will it last? What does it really cost? Can I repair it? If the answers to these questions are not satisfactory — **REJECT!** don't buy!

▶▶ If you are not happy about the packaging you see, **REACT!** Many manufacturers list their toll-free numbers on their packages. If something is poorly packaged, call the company and say so. Ask clerks not to double wrap your packages.

▶▶ Use your shopping list as a reminder of your favorite products in recyclable and recycled packaging.

▶▶ After you *precycle*, remember to *recycle* as much as possible.

▶▶ Composting is a satisfying way to turn certain kitchen waste into an excellent soil amendment. Composting fruit and vegetable peelings, eggshells, coffee grounds, tea bags, etc., helps your garden by improving the fertility of your soil; saves you water by helping your soil hold moisture; and helps the environment by recycling valuable organic resources and extending the life of our landfills.

▶▶ Electric appliances create less waste than appliances that require batteries. If you must use battery-operated products, consider investing in a battery charger and use rechargeable batteries.

▶▶ Schedule an environmental shopping presentation for your club, or civic organization. It will offer you the opportunity to become aware of the variety of products and packaging choices available when you shop. Call 201-807-5821 for further assistance, and to schedule a presentation.

Some terms you should know.

BIODEGRADABLE A substance that can be broken down by microorganisms into simple, stable compounds such as carbon dioxide and water.

ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS To change our attitudes and improve our knowledge of the solid waste crisis by recognizing both the scope of the problem and our responsibility for its solution through careful buying and responsible waste disposal.

PACKAGING A product's wrapping or sealing which is usually designed to attract purchasers.

PRECYCLE To make purchasing decisions that will reduce waste. Precycling is the first step before recycling when we make a conscious choice to buy and use products which will have a less harmful effect on the environment.

RECYCLE The collection and processing of manufactured materials for reuse either in the same form or as part of a different product.

RECYCLABLE A product which can be recycled in the future. It does NOT mean it is made from recycled materials. These terms are often confused. Also, remember that even if a product claims to be "recyclable," if you cannot recycle it in your community, it is garbage.

REUSE To extend the life of an item by repairing or modifying it, or by creating new uses for it.

SOLID WASTE Any garbage, refuse, trash or material that is discarded or abandoned and is intended for disposal.

SOURCE REDUCTION To reduce the amount of solid waste that enters the waste stream by: reducing the total volume of disposable packaging material generated; reducing the disposal impact of packaging waste by changing to more environmentally benign packaging material; increasing the recyclability of product packaging; and increasing the recycled material content in packaging production.

SOURCE SEPARATION To separate recyclables and non-recyclables at the place where the trash is created. A curbside recycling program is an example of source separation.

