



*If not you, who?*

# Reducing waste at home

Households in Minnesota are creating and throwing away more waste than ever. From junk mail to excess paint to food scraps – it takes a lot of time and money to deal with all of this garbage! Fortunately, there's a lot you can do to reduce your waste at home. Besides, nobody likes taking out the trash...

## What can I do?

### Reduce excess paper at home

A good portion of what you throw in the garbage each day is paper. Much of the paper generated in our homes comes in the mail. The average American household receives more than 500 pieces of advertising mail each year.

You can take action to reduce the amount of unwanted mail you receive.

- ▶ If you want to get off most national marketing lists, you can register with the Direct Marketing Association's Mail Preference Service at PO Box 9008, Farmingdale, NY 11735-9008.
- ▶ If you just want to stop certain catalogs, you can contact individual mailers and ask

them to remove your name from their mailing lists; call them or send your request by mail or e-mail.

- ▶ There's also a toll-free number to stop mailings of credit card offers. One call to 1-888-5-OPT-OUT will reach the major national credit bureaus, Equifax, Experian and Trans Union.

**Benefits:** Recycling junk mail is good, but reducing the flow of junk mail will conserve natural resources, save landfill space, and save you time and money.



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[www.reduce.org](http://www.reduce.org)

## Reduce **packaging** waste

Packaging makes up 30 percent of municipal solid waste. You can reduce the amount of packaging you throw in the garbage by purchasing items that have less packaging.

**Examples:** Reduce the amount of packaging by purchasing concentrates and diluting them with water in reusable containers. Avoid single-serving products in favor of larger servings or buying in bulk. Take your own reusable cloth bag so you don't need *paper or plastic*.

**Benefits:** Over-packaged products often cost more than less packaged products. This means that you can save money when buying products with less packaging.



## Reduce **mercury** in your home

Mercury evaporates easily and travels great distances through the atmosphere. It ends up in our lakes and rivers where it accumulates in fish and other creatures. Mercury, a nerve toxin, is especially dangerous when ingested (i.e., eating contaminated fish) by pregnant women, women planning to have children in the future, and children. The best way to keep mercury out of the home and the environment is not to buy mercury-containing products. However, when that's unavoidable, when it comes time to throw these products away, make sure they are taken to a household hazardous waste facility for recycling.

**Example:** Mercury is found in many common household items such as fever and cooking thermometers, tilt switches in many thermostats, steam irons with 15-minute auto shut-off, neon lamps, older batteries, fluorescent lamps, switches that stop washing machines when the top is open, "silent" wall switches, mercury vapor, high pressure sodium and metal halide lamps.

When buying these types of products, look for non-mercury alternatives, like digital fever thermometers and alcohol-based cooking thermometers. Replacing your thermostat? Consider a digital or electronic one that contains no mercury.

**Benefits:** It is against the law to throw mercury-containing products away in the garbage. Proper management of mercury-containing products means keeping the mercury intact and bringing it to your local household hazardous waste site. Efforts like these to remove mercury from our garbage has meant lower mercury emission levels from waste disposal.

*Tilt switches like this one from an older household thermostat contain a potentially dangerous amount of mercury. When it comes time to replace mercury-containing items such as this, don't throw the old ones in the garbage! Bring them to your local **household hazardous waste drop-off site**. Then choose mercury-free alternatives.*



## Prevent food waste and **compost** organics

According to the USDA, 27 percent of the nation's total food supply — 97 billion pounds — was wasted in 1995. Food is wasted in many ways, such as preparing too much, letting fresh food go bad and buying too much.

**Examples:** Planning meals and creating a list of what you need before you go to the grocery store will help you buy only what you need. Composting leftover fruit and vegetable food waste with your yard waste helps create high nutrient compost. Donate excess canned goods to a food shelf.

**Benefits:** Making better use of the food you buy will save you money and reduce how much food you throw away. Composting the remaining food waste will provide you with a great additive for your garden.

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## Use the least hazardous cleaning products



In a state the size of Minnesota with about 4.4 million people, approximately 572 tons of liquid cleaners and 132 tons of toilet bowl cleaners are washed down the drain each month. Read the labels of cleaners and look for the signal words — *caution*, *warning*, *danger* and *poison* — which indicate the level of hazard.

Use the least hazardous product to do the job. (*Caution* is least hazardous and *danger* is most hazardous. Extremely toxic products must also include the word *poison*.) Read the instructions on how to use cleaning products and be sure to use the correct amount. Remember, you won't get twice the results by using twice as much.

**Example:** Reading labels gives you information on how to use a cleaning product correctly and how dangerous a product might be. You could also consider using a substitute for cleaning projects around the house. For example, vinegar and water work well to wash windows and floors. Another idea is to share any excess products with someone else who can use them, such as your neighbor or friend. Instead of buying many different types of cleaners, use one general-purpose cleaner.

**Benefits:** With so many choices of products to clean your house, it can be difficult to choose the best one for your household. Buying cleaning products with the least dangerous signal word and using substitutes will reduce the amount of hazardous chemicals in your home.



## Become a label reader

Look for key words on labels and choose the least hazardous product.

Less toxic ↑ ↓ More toxic	<b>Caution</b>	mild/moderate
	<b>Warning</b>	moderate hazard
	<b>Danger</b>	extremely flammable, corrosive or highly toxic
	<b>Poison</b>	highly toxic

Source: Minnesota Pollution Control Agency

## Buy the right amount of paint for the job

In 1998, almost 4 million pounds of excess paint were collected at Minnesota's household hazardous waste sites. A large volume of this paint was still useable. If stored correctly, paint stays in good condition for a long time. If it mixes smoothly, it can still be used.



**Example:** Before you begin a painting project, measure the area first. Calculate the area to be painted (height x width = total square feet). One gallon covers about 400 square feet. To prevent paint from drying out, cover the paint can (use its original container) with plastic wrap, replace the lid securely and store upside down. Protect your paint from freezing. Use leftover paint for touch-up jobs, smaller projects or as a primer.

**Benefits:** Using either low-VOC or water-based paint, stains, finishes and paint stripper will help keep hazardous chemicals out of your home. Using up paint instead of disposing it is the best method to deal with leftover paint.

## Reduce the need for pesticides in your home

The best method to control pests inside the home is to clean up crumbs and spills quickly. Pesticides are designed to kill weeds, insects, rodents, mold and moths.

Disinfectants are a type of pesticide. Some are more toxic than others and can be poisonous to pets, livestock, wildlife and humans.

**Example:** Good housekeeping and proper maintenance of your home can help prevent pests from entering your home. Store food in tightly sealed containers. Eliminate moisture problems and leaks. Keep vegetation and debris away from the foundation. Caulk cracks and weather strip windows and doors to eliminate easy paths of entry. Non-hazardous products are available for a majority of pests.

**Benefits:** Eliminating the need for pesticides is the best way to keep chemicals and pests out of your home.



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## Find **new** life for **old** furnishings, appliances and clothes

Instead of discarding your unwanted furniture, appliances, tools or clothes, try selling or donating them to groups and organizations that accept used goods. When deciding to purchase an item, consider buying used. Those items are less expensive than new ones and are often just as good.

**Example:** Donate or resell items to thrift stores or other organizations in need. You could receive a tax deduction or cash for them. Buy and sell secondhand items at fairs, bazaars, swap meets and garage sales. Organize a garage sale in your neighborhood to encourage your neighbors to get involved in reducing waste.

**Benefits:** You can save money as well as reduce waste by purchasing furniture, appliances and clothes used.



## Maintain your **vehicle**

Cars can be a large source of pollution both through tailpipe emissions and through maintenance. The regular servicing of vehicles creates waste that needs special handling, especially used oil and oil filters.

**Example:** Follow manufacturer's recommendations for vehicle maintenance: change your oil regularly, keep the tires inflated correctly and have it serviced regularly. Always make sure you properly dispose of your used oil and filters. Also, try to find ways to use your car less by walking, biking, riding the bus or car pooling to your destination. Or combine your errands to reduce the number of trips you make. Both of these will reduce "wear and tear" on your vehicle, as well as curb air pollution. When purchasing a new or used car, first ask yourself what you need (i.e. vehicle and engine size), and buy according to your needs.



**Benefits:** Proper maintenance of your car will ensure that it will last longer, save you money and reduce the need to buy a new one. Finding other ways to get to where you need to go lowers emissions given off into the environment. Properly managing waste oil and oil filters keeps these contaminants out of landfills and energy recovery facilities (garbage incinerators) and helps protect our natural resources.

**TO LEARN MORE ABOUT WHAT YOU CAN DO:**

**[www.reduce.org](http://www.reduce.org)**

*Reduce Waste — If not you, who?*

For more information, contact:



Your county solid waste office is a great resource for waste reduction materials, including local waste and environmental information, education resources and speakers.