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Recycling the holiday flotsam and jetsam

By Tom Watson

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Recycling has become a fixture of the Seattle holiday season, like the Christmas ships, the "Nutcracker" and the rain.

While many of us have reduced our holiday consumption, we still count on recycling to deal with the remaining detritus. We want to recycle it all: gift wrap, packaging, food waste, the Christmas tree and even the old toys, clothing and electronics replaced by this year's models.

And in fact, most of our holiday castoffs can be recycled or reused. As holiday celebrations reach their peak this week, here's a guide to keep you from wasting away afterward.

Gift wrap

Wrapping paper can go in your curbside recycling bin. A little tape is fine, but remove the big pieces. If it's not too wrinkled or torn, consider saving wrapping paper, along with ribbons and bows. Glittery paper and ribbons that you can't use again should go in the garbage.



Resources

- King County Solid Waste: 206-296-4466, www.metrokc.gov/dnrp/swd
- Seattle Public Utilities: 206-684-3000, www.seattle.gov/util/services

Packaging

Paper and cardboard belong in your recycling bin, but not plastic packaging for products. That heavy, clear plastic that encases toys, batteries and many other products is not accepted by any local recycling programs (even if it has the "recycling arrows" symbol on it). It all needs to go in the trash, as do the big polystyrene (Styrofoam) chunks used to protect electronics.

Shipping businesses, such as UPS Stores, may accept clean packing peanuts. To find the nearest peanut-recycling location, call 800-828-2214 or visit www.loosefillpackaging.com.

Some progressive companies now use little "air pillows" for packing, which you should save for your own reuse.

- Snohomish County Solid Waste: 425-388-3425, www1.co.snohomish.wa.us/Departments/Public_Works/Divisions/SolidWaste
- Pierce County Solid Waste: 253-798-2179, www.co.pierce.wa.us/pc/abtus/ourorg/pwu/about/solwasterecmenu.htm
- King County food waste recycling: www.recyclefood.com
- Food banks: www.seattle.gov/humanservices/emergencyservices/emergencyfood.htm

Christmas trees and wreaths

Check with your local solid waste management agency about options for Christmas "tree-cycling." Many agencies post info on their Web sites about this, beginning this week. You can usually put the Christmas tree in with your curbside yard waste, but for some programs you need to cut the tree down to 4-foot lengths or shorter.

Private yard-waste recyclers also generally accept Christmas trees (fees may be charged), and many community groups sponsor holiday "tree-cycling" fundraising events.

Wreaths and garland can go in your yard-waste container, but first remove all wires and ribbons.

Food

After the holiday meal, refrigerate leftovers promptly. To make sure all leftovers get used, distribute them among guests as they leave.

In Seattle and most of King County, you can put food waste in your yard-waste container. Check with your city or hauler to confirm that you have this service, and which food wastes you can include (no meat or dairy products if your yard waste is collected every other week).

If you have an unopened food gift you don't want, or unopened canned foods you didn't use for the

holiday dinner, food banks welcome donations.

Electronics

This has been another big year for electronic gifts, so you most likely have older equipment you no longer want. The nonprofit InterConnection (www.interconnection.org, 206-310-4547) in Seattle's Wallingford neighborhood refurbishes computers to make Internet technology accessible to nonprofits in developing countries. They accept some items (working and nonworking) at no charge, and others for a small fee.

Other businesses and nonprofits that reuse or recycle electronic equipment in King, Snohomish and Pierce counties are listed at www.takeitbacknetwork.org.

Toys, clothes, household items

Thrift stores or charities will accept most other usable items. Don't waste their time by giving them things that don't work or are too beat-up to resell.

For charity locations, check the "What Do I Do With ... ?" section of the King County Web site under Furniture, Misc. Household Items or Textiles/Clothing. If clothing is torn or stained, put it in the trash or cut it up to use for rags.

Donating your old stuff, and all holiday recycling for that matter, ends the season on a positive note as you gear up for a fresh new year.

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