

Homes & Real Estate

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Put holiday waste in its place by reducing and recycling

Let's take a quick tour, or more like a sleigh ride, of holiday-recycling options available in the Seattle area, along with ideas to cut back on creating holiday trash.

By Tom Watson

Special to NWhomes

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Holiday recycling is the gift that keeps on giving.

Recycling and reusing your trashed packaging and other detritus from the holidays shouldn't be a reason for overconsumption, of course. Think of it instead as an additional holiday gift — an opportunity to give waste a new life.

Let's take a quick tour, or more like a sleigh ride, of holiday-recycling options available in the Seattle area. But preventing waste always trumps recycling, so we'll tackle that first.

Two no-brainer ways to reduce holiday waste in advance are with gift wrapping and food preparation.

Resolve to not buy any new gift wrap this holiday season. Most of us already have rolls of wrapping paper or gift bags stashed somewhere, if we can just find them.

Instead, wrap presents with comics pages from the Sunday newspaper, kids' artwork, calendar pages or old maps. For a small gift, you can create shiny silver wrap by taking a common foil-lined chip or snack bag, rinsing it and turning it inside out.

We can reduce our food waste by making sure leftovers get eaten after holiday dinners and parties. Distribute leftovers to guests who love them. For your keeper holiday leftovers, label the containers and plan future meals around them, rather than letting them turn into a science project in the back of the fridge.

For more-ambitious holiday-waste prevention, limit the gifts you buy that are encased in that hard, clear plastic packaging that is nearly impossible to open. Most recycling programs, including Seattle's, don't accept that type of plastic (no stable commercial market for that material currently exists), so it needs to go in the garbage.

Here's what to do with other common holiday recyclables:

Gift wrap and paper packaging. All paper and cardboard can go in your recycling cart, except for food-soiled paper; put that in the yard/food waste cart. Save attractive, non-trashed wrapping paper and bags for next year. Gift wrap with foil or plastic goes in the garbage if it can't be reused.

Polystyrene (commonly called Styrofoam). Those white foam blocks and packing peanuts

don't go in your recycling cart. Several places in our area do accept them for recycling or reuse, including Styro Recycle in Renton and some shipping stores.

To find polystyrene-recycling locations, check King County's recycling listings at kingcounty.gov/whatdoidowith (choose the Plastic category). The site will also help you find collection locations for other hard-to-recycle items, holiday-related or otherwise.

Clothing, toys and household items. Make way for new holiday arrivals by donating your old stuff to a thrift store or nonprofit program. Don't donate broken items such as toys — throw those away. However, charities and other textile-collection locations now accept clothes, shoes and linens, even if they're not in resalable condition, because textile-recycling markets have expanded recently. Check with the collector if you're not sure.

Electronics. Computers, monitors, TVs, portable DVD players and e-readers can be recycled at hundreds of Western Washington locations at no charge through the state's E-Cycle Washington program (ecyclewashington.org), which requires manufacturers to pay the costs of recycling and proper disposal for those items.

Holiday lights. Whether you have broken bulbs or you've upgraded to the energy-efficient LED types, you can recycle your old lights. The copper in the light strings has value for the recycling industry. Visit King County's kcgreenholidays.com for an up-to-date list of recycling locations for holiday lights, as well as other green holiday tips.

Christmas trees. Check with local governments for "tree-cycling" options. Most will post this information on their websites in mid-December. Collected trees get turned into mulch or compost. Some programs pick up Christmas trees for free at the curb. Community groups may also sponsor collections, for a fee or donation.

One million tons of extra waste pours into American landfills during the holiday season, Consumer Reports magazine recently reported. By recycling our holiday waste, or not creating it in the first place, we can at least put it where it belongs.

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