

Holiday Waste Reduction

On an average day, a typical New Mexican creates over 5 pounds of waste. But from Thanksgiving to New Years Day, household waste increases by more than 25%. Added food waste, shopping bags, packaging, wrapping paper, bows and ribbons—it all adds up to an additional **1 million tons a week** to the nation's garbage piles. In fact, 38,000 miles of ribbon alone is thrown out each year--enough to tie a bow around the Earth!

And it's not just trash. The average American spends \$800 on gifts over the holiday season. Think about your time and energy spent driving all around town looking at so much stuff, and dealing with the hustle and bustle of the mall. It's no wonder that so many people get stressed out during the holidays! Maybe it's time for a new tradition – a no-waste holiday season.

As part of its ongoing efforts to reduce waste, the Los Alamos County Solid Waste Division would like to help you cut the amount of trash you put out at the curb during the upcoming holiday season. This site is your one-stop site for all the information you'll need to take a few simple steps toward keeping holiday waste out of the landfill. These pages are loaded with useful tips on reducing holiday waste.

We have gathered some holiday gift ideas from many sources to help you reduce the amount of waste you generate during the holiday season. By implementing these ideas, you can also reduce holiday costs. Be creative and have fun!

Gift Wrapping

Trying to avoid the "gift wrap trap!" Here are some great ideas for gift wrapping alternatives.

- Scarves, handkerchiefs or bandannas.
- Old posters and maps.
- Pages from a child's coloring book taped together (especially nice for relatives who would enjoy the artwork).
- Old sheet music.
- Newspapers (foreign newspapers are great).
- Last year's holiday paper (press with warm iron if wrinkled).
- Wallpaper scraps.
- Home-sewn cloth bags.
- Fabric scraps.
- Pictures or advertisements from magazines and catalogs.
- Sunday comic pages.
- A present in a present (for example, a hat in a matching scarf, jewelry in a wooden box, cookies in a reusable tin or cookie jar, barbecue grill utensils or picnic supplies in a tablecloth, kitchen gifts in towels or all-purpose cloths).
- A plain box decorated with leftover glitter, paint, markers, etc.
- A cake pan, basket or a wooden box.



- Reusable decorative bags.
- A “Hollywood box:” individually wrap or decorate the top and bottom of a box with a separate lid. Encourage the recipient to reuse the box.
- Purchase wrapping paper made from recycled paper.



Bows and Ribbons

These items make an eye-catching final touch:

- Bows saved from other gifts.
- Reusable items, such as hair bows, ornaments, shoe laces or toys.
- Stencils or pictures from holiday cards pasted onto a plain brown paper bag or box.
- Last year's holiday cards cut up for gift tags.
- Old neckties.
- Spices, such as bundled cinnamon sticks or cloves in mesh cloth.
- Scrap fabric, lace, yarn, rickrack and seam tape.
- Scarves.
- Combinations of beads and buttons.
- Dried or silk flowers.

Holiday tree

- Consider buying a potted Norfolk pine, fig tree or indoor house plant that can be used every holiday season as your evergreen tree.
 - Purchase a tree from a tree farm rather than cutting one down in the wild.
 - Use trimmed branches from your tree for decorating around the home or making wreaths.
 - Consider buying an artificial tree that can be reused every year.
 - Decorate evergreen bushes or pine trees outside a window with removable, reusable decorations.



Tree Ornaments and Decorating

Here are a few ideas for adding a special touch to holiday decorations:

- Memorabilia, such as a child's first shoe or grandma's hankie scented with perfume.
- An old full skirt as a tree skirt.
- Old jewelry (restricting old necklaces, hang earrings or bracelets).
- Items collected on vacation.
- Small stuffed animals and toys.
- Cookie cutters.
- Miniature toy cars.



- Dressed-up doll as a tree-topper.
- Holiday card ornaments: cut up; glue felt fabric scraps on back; tie with yarn scraps.
- Edible cookie ornaments: use gingerbread or sugar cookie dough; poke a hole at the tip using a drinking straw; decorate and bake; thread a ribbon through hole; tie ribbon in a large loop and hang on bough of tree.
- Small pictures from old magazines or holiday cards: cut out; glue onto old plastic lid; decorate with beads, buttons or jewelry; punch a hole and hang with string or yarn.
- Popcorn and cranberry strings (can be eaten by animals after the holidays).
- Reusable glass icicles instead of disposable tinsel (keeps tree clean for mulching).
- Buttons knotted on a sturdy length of string.
- Spices from the kitchen instead of commercially prepared and packaged products or aerosols (for example, create pomander balls by placing whole cloves in oranges or lemons to create decorations that look and smell great).
- Gingerbread people and reindeer from leftover brown paper grocery bags (place on windows and walls for decoration.)
- Tin can luminary (punch holes into empty metal can; place candle inside.)

Holiday Cards

Have you ever thought about all the paper used to make holiday cards? This year, consider buying cards made from recycled paper (look for "post-consumer" content) and printed in non-toxic inks.

Also buy cards and envelopes that can be recycled. Email your holiday cards or choose cards printed on white stock without metallic or plastic coatings and buy cards wrapped in the least bulky or most recyclable packaging.

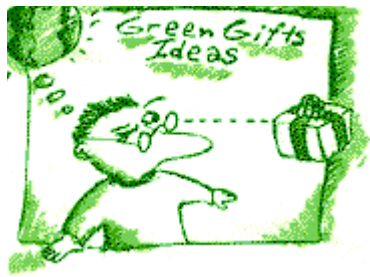
Consider substituting postcards for cards that require envelopes and reuse the fronts of old holiday cards as gift tags.

Party waste reduction tips

These suggestions can really reduce the amount you have to throw away after a party:

- Buy baking goods and snack food in bulk or large volumes.
- Use reusable tableware; if you don't have enough, ask to borrow reusable tableware from friends or family.
- Rent dishes, napkins, cups and saucers, tablecloths and glasses instead of using expensive disposables.
- Cut up last year's holiday cards and use as place cards.
 - Use outdated calendars taped together to make a unique New Year's tablecloth.
 - Place easily identifiable recycling containers at your celebration so guests can recycle their pop cans, bottles, etc.





- Encourage host or hostess to reuse and recycle bows, wrapping paper, cans, glass, etc.
- Point out the ways your party demonstrates waste reduction and recycling, and SPREAD THE WORD.

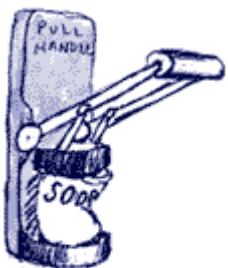
Reducing waste and giving “green gifts” during the holiday season

Think conservation, not consumption. There are many gifts that actually help people (especially younger ones) learn the value of saving resources, rather than spending them. We also include in this category gifts that don't require you to purchase any physical stuff. Avoid the trap of “How much should I spend?”

- Look for gifts that are unpackaged or minimally packaged, without unnecessary plastic wrap or cardboard backing.
- Evaluate the gift for simplicity and durability.
- Personalized "coupons," such as a night off from dish duty, a foot massage, etc.
 - Give a donation to a charity in someone else's name.
 - Give services or time instead of stuff (music or language lessons, trip to a state park, etc.)
 - Give tickets to sports, theater, concert or other event.
 - Give an experience (for example, a ride in a hot air balloon or a river rafting trip).
 - Consider the impact of your gift: Is it environmentally friendly and safe for children? Will it be reusable? Is it recyclable or made from recycled materials?
 - Purchase holiday cards made from recycled paper or make your own from items found around the home. You may also choose to send electronic cards.
- Help someone recycle – give a can crusher, a set of recycling bins or a recycling cart.
- Draw names or share the cost of a gift with a sibling or friend.
- Make a giant edible cookie holiday card; put on a personal greeting with icing.
- Give a garden! Seeds, gloves, tools, etc.
- Create a family recipe book or picture album.
- **Give the gift of time** Nothing costs less or means more than spending time with loved ones. Enjoy your family and friends, and your need to find joy through consumption will decline.

Other ideas for gifts:

- Membership to a museum or nonprofit organization.
- Theater tickets.
 - Free baby-sitting service.
 - New parents? How about diaper service for a month?
 - Share in an environmental fund.
 - Reusable lunch bag.
 - Refillable pens.



- Energy-saving fluorescent light fixture or bulb. (Compact fluorescent bulbs last longer and use about 1/4 to 1/3 of the energy of an incandescent bulb. Substituting a compact fluorescent light for a traditional bulb will keep a half-ton of CO₂ out of the atmosphere over the life of the bulb.)
- 100% cotton dish towels or sheets; look for unbleached cotton.
- Reusable coffee cup.
- Gift basket filled with non-toxic household cleaners.
- An old tricycle, bicycle, rocking chair, etc., fixed up to pass along as an heirloom.
- Automatic thermostat control device (automatically turns down heat at night).
- Compost bin.
- Reusable food storage containers.
- Cloth shopping bag.
- Cloth napkins and rings.
- House plant.
- Solar watch or calculator.
- Reusable razor.
- Durable hand tools.
- Durable wooden toys.
- Quilts and comforters.
- Water-saving showerhead.
- Gourmet dinner for a busy couple.
- Bird feeder and seed.
- A subscription to a favorite environmental magazine.
- Stationery – made from recycled paper, of course – and stamps.
- Reusable bags, bows and gift wrapping.
- Car safety kit packed into a coffee can (e.g. candles, orange hazard triangle, etc.).
- Shutoff-timer for watering the lawn.

Volunteer and Donate

Giving your time and/or money to worthy causes not only helps your community, but gives you a sense of contribution and involvement that is hard to quantify.

Start a new tradition—pick one night a month that your family will donate time at a local shelter handing out food. It is important for children to help others. Studies show that people who help others are healthier and happier.

Children who volunteer enhance their self-esteem as they learn new skills and make new friends. They see themselves as kind people capable of making a difference, and they learn to live a more hopeful life. Volunteer activities help build character and teach social responsibility, greater empathy and compassion. Teach that who you are is more important than what you have.

Coupon ideas

- Walking the dog after school each day for a period of time.
- Cooking some meals, or offering to help shop and clean up.





- Watching younger brother or sister.
- Commit to extra chores: Housecleaning, shoveling, lawn mowing.
- Make a book of family recipes.
- Putting together a scrap book or family tree.
- Hugs and kisses.

Gifts to avoid

- Over-packaged, resource-consuming gifts.
- Plastic or electric gadgets with limited use.
- Disposable products.
- Anything in aerosol containers (ask for non-aerosol alternatives).

After the holidays

- Save packing material, wrapping and tissue paper for reuse.
- Use leftover gift wrap to line shelves and dresser drawers.
- Cut up leftover wrap to make scratch pads.
- Save bows, ribbon, tags, festive bags and boxes for next year.
- Recycle your tree! Some communities make discarded holiday trees into mulch for use in community parks. Call your county for more information.
- Send used holiday cards (front picture only) to St. Jude's Ranch for Children, 100 St. Jude Street, Boulder City, Nevada 89005-1618. St. Jude's also accepts cards (front picture only) from all occasions. Children at St. Jude's will use your old cards to make new cards.

Green resolutions for the New Year

- Use only cloth cleaning towels.
- Install water-saving devices in your toilet and shower.
- Walk or bicycle at least one car errand weekly.
- Use reusable cloth shopping bags (keep reusable shopping bags in your car so they will always be handy).
- Use a reusable coffee cup at work.
- Switch to compact fluorescent lights to save energy.
- Turn down the thermostat at night.
- Recycle bottles, cans, newspaper, office paper, plastic and cardboard.
- Buy recycled products.
- Compost.
- Plant at least one tree.
- Turn off the shower while you soap to save water.
- Use biodegradable laundry soap rather than petroleum-based detergents.
- Reduce use of pesticides and other hazardous household chemicals. Use safer substitutes instead.
- Write or call legislators, store managers and others to let them know how you feel about environmental issues.

- Want to reduce waste from unwanted catalogs and direct mail? Request to remove your name from future mailing lists. [CLICK HERE](#) for more information.

Here Are Some Staggering Facts on Holiday Waste

- According to a national survey, 70% of Americans would welcome less emphasis on gift giving and spending. (Source: Center for a New American Dream)
- 5 million extra tons of trash is produced between Thanksgiving and New Years Day in the United States each year. (Source: 1997 Use Less Stuff Report)
- Between Thanksgiving and Christmas, Americans send out more than 2.3 billion cards. Laid end to end, that's almost 26,000 miles worth of cards, enough to circle the Earth and then some. (Source: Use Less Stuff Holiday Campaign and Columbia Public Works Volunteer Program.)
- At least 28 billion pounds of edible food are wasted each year, or over 100 pounds per person. (Source: Use Less Stuff Holiday Campaign and Columbia Public Works Volunteer Program.)
- Much of the 28 billion pounds of edible food thrown away each year is wasted during the holiday season. For example, if every American throws away just one bite of turkey with gravy, 8 million pounds of food is wasted. One uneaten tablespoon of mashed potatoes adds 16 million pounds of waste, while one discarded spoonful of cranberry sauce amounts to more than 14 million pounds. (Source: Cygnus Group)
- The biggest single component of our waste stream in containers and packaging. Every year, Americans toss out 72.4 million tons of packaging, one third of our total waste stream. (Source: Center for a New American Dream)
- Annual trash from gift-wrap and shopping bags totals about 4 million tons. (Source: Use Less Stuff Report)
- According to the Use Less Stuff Report, a bi-monthly newsletter on waste reduction, if every household reused just two feet of ribbon each year, the resulting 38,000 miles of ribbon could tie a bow around the Earth.
- If every family reduced its weekly waste during the holidays by just one pound, the total trash eliminated would be 250,000 tons. (Source: The Cygnus Group)
- If everyone wrapped just three gifts in reused paper, it would save enough paper to cover 45,000 football fields. (Source: Cygnus Group)
- The 2.65 billion Christmas cards sold each year in the U.S. could fill a football field 10 stories high or circle the planet 10 times. If everyone sent one card fewer, it would save 50,000 cubic yards of paper. (Source: Cygnus Group)
- Each year, 50 million Christmas trees are purchased in the U.S. (Source: Cygnus Group) of those, 30-plus million get carted to the landfill every year. (Source: Environmental News Network)
- Each year an average of 40,000 pounds of new materials are consumed for each American, as well as the energy equivalent of 30,000 pounds of coal. (Source: Ohio EPA office of Pollution Prevention)
- The average newborn infant will need a lifetime supply of 800 pounds of lead...750 pound of zinc...1,500 pounds of copper...3,593 pounds of aluminum...32,700 pounds of iron...26,550 pounds of clays...28,213 pounds of

salt...and 1,238,101 pounds of stone, sand, gravel, and cement. (Source: Ohio EPA office of Pollution Prevention)

Links you'll like

Tips and inspiration abound on the World Wide Web!

- The **Center for a New American Dream** offers up ideas to ["Simplify the Holidays."](#) with suggestions for planning a holiday season that's less focused on "stuff."
In King County, Washington, [Waste-Free Holidays](#) focus on giving the "gift of experience" instead of "stuff." While these are Seattle-area attractions, there are a lot of ideas that Grays Harbor County residents can find locally.
- The **Use Less Stuff Report (ULS)** offers up ["42 Ways to Trim Your Holiday Wasteline"](#) — an interesting checklist of waste reduction tips for the holidays. Check out ["Have A Low Impact Y2K Christmas"](#), with more tips about reducing waste during the holidays, and some good advice on how the average person can make the biggest impact on the environment.
- The **California Integrated Waste Management Board** encourages you to ["Deck the Halls with Less Waste!"](#)
- The **Environmental Defense Fund** offers advice to help shoppers [use their "greenbacks" to make their world a "greener place."](#)
- **Co-op America** has put up their [WoodWise Holiday Tips](#), with ideas about how you can slow down in the "race to waste" around the holidays.
- <http://www.sciswa.org/crafts.html> **RECYCLED CRAFTS** - Teach your children about waste reduction by making crafts using waste materials. You will also find ways to reduce, reuse, recycle and simplify during the holidays.
- <http://www.make-stuff.com/holidays/christmas.html> **Recycling Craft Ideas for Christmas**