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Title: Holiday waste reduction tips

Which is the better environmental choice for Christmas trees...Real or fake? Here are some facts to consider: Around 98% of Real Christmas Trees are grown on farms throughout all 50 states and Canada. These trees are planted to be harvested, just as corn is cultivated for harvest. The Christmas Tree industry in the United States employs more than 100,000 Americans (part- and full-time). Meanwhile, 85% of fake trees are made by factory workers in China. Every acre of Christmas Trees grown produces the daily oxygen requirement for 18 people. With approximately 500,000 million acres of trees, 9 million people a day are supplied with oxygen thanks to these trees. Real Christmas Trees support life by absorbing carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases; they also stabilize soil, protect water supplies and provide a refuge for wildlife. For each Real Christmas Tree harvested, up to three new seedlings are planted in its place. In 2006, more than 42 million new seedlings will be planted by Christmas Tree farmers all over the United States. And after the holidays, a Real Christmas Tree is the only choice that is completely recyclable. Artificial trees typically end up in landfills, where they will remain for centuries after disposal. In a national survey, 69% of consumers who used a Real Tree said they recycled theirs in a community program. You decide, but I am thankful to have a real tree this year! I will be recycling mine at Isabella County Recycling Center for \$5 after the holidays. Trees will be accepted any time during normal business hours.

Real Christmas Trees are recycled for five main types of large-scale uses for post-harvest trees. These are: 1) Chipping (chippings are used for various things from mulch to hiking trails) 2) Beachfront erosion prevention 3) Lake and river shoreline stabilization 4) Fish habitat 5) River delta sedimentation management. Learn more about Christmas Tree recycling at www.realchristmastrees.org/recycle.html.

"And he puzzled three hours, till his puzzler was sore. Then the Grinch thought of something he hadn't before! "Maybe Christmas," he thought, "doesn't come from a store. Maybe Christmas perhaps means a little bit more!" - from *How The Grinch Stole Christmas* by Dr. Suess.

Reduce – Rather than giving “stuff” to people for Christmas, give them a gift of your time or something personal that can be used up. Give gift certificates for chores, babysitting, or a lesson in something you are good at (such as skiing, playing an instrument, cooking, etc.) Other great gifts include gift certificates or tickets to a concert, museum or sporting event. If you must give something material, think of how you can reduce waste generated with each gift. “Wrap” gifts in a reusable canvas shopping bag, dish/bath towel, laundry basket, flower pot, basket, hat/mittens/gloves/scarf, socks, Christmas stocking, etc. Everyone loves homemade food, and gifts of houseplants help everyone breathe easier. If every family reused just two feet of holiday ribbon, the 38,000 miles of ribbon saved could tie a bow around the Earth!

Did you know...Americans throw away 25% more trash between Thanksgiving and the New Year than any other time of year?

Party time – Reduce waste by using dishes, silverware, and cloth napkins instead of disposable paper products and utensils. After the party, don't throw away the leftovers! Encourage guests to bring a plastic container with a lid to take leftovers home, or donate to local food banks. At least 28 billion pounds of edible food are wasted each year.

Home for the Holidays – Visit local attractions you have never visited. Call your local Chamber of Commerce or Convention and Visitor's Bureau, see a play at your local college/university or theater. You'll probably be surprised at the local attractions you will enjoy. Plus, you will be supporting your local economy and saving fuel emissions. If every family reduced holiday gasoline consumption by one gallon, traveling about 20 miles less, we would reduce greenhouse gas emissions by one million tons!

BYOB – Ahem...bring your own bag. Reduce the amount of shopping bags used this holiday season (and all year long.) In most cases, bringing your own bag saves you money on your shopping bill. It also saves the retailer money. Most of all, it reduces waste!

Get Crafty – Get together with family and/or friends to make your own gifts. Some examples are: baked goods, soaps, candles, cards, jewelry, or scrapbooks. With special paper available at craft stores, you can put favorite photos on fabric and make things such as quilts, bags or pillowcases.

Toys, Toys and more Toys – When buying electronic toys and games, remember the rechargeable batteries. Make sure to find out if the family has a battery charger. Explain why rechargeable batteries are important, and make sure everyone knows these special batteries (and all other non-rechargeable batteries) are not to be thrown away. Tell them to take their spent batteries to the Isabella County Recycling Center.

Save Energy – Put Christmas lights on a timer, or turn them off during the day and while sleeping. Also, LED lights use 90% less energy.

Bah, Compost! – Even though it doesn't compost as quickly during cold Michigan winter months, keep composting! You will have richer soil come Spring and Summer 2008! After the holidays, don't forget to "Tree Cycle!"

If you have questions (or ideas!) about recycling or holiday waste reduction, please contact me at 989-773-9631 or recycling@isabellacounty.org. Happy Recycling and Happy Holidays!

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