



Solid
Waste
Management
Coordinating
Board

Packaging Reduction

Prepared for 2009 Community POWER Grantees. Visit RethinkRecycling.com for more information on this and other waste related topics. This information has been approved by county staff and may be reproduced using the credit line below. Be sure to have your county staff contact review any changes made to this document before publishing.

This information has been provided by the Solid Waste Management Coordinating Board through a Community POWER (Partners on Waste Education and Reduction) Grant. Visit RethinkRecycling.com your go-to-guide for waste and recycling in the Twin Cities.

Introduction

Packaging makes up 30% of the weight of trash and 50% of trash by volume. All this waste has to go somewhere; some waste is recycled, but most is either buried in a landfill or burned at a waste-to-energy facility. Either option has environmental and economic consequences. But there is a better way – not to make the waste in the first place! The most important of the three “R’s” is **Reduce**.

We pay for packaging when we buy a product and when we throw it away. Choosing products with minimal packaging will save you money and reduce the amount of waste produced. After making a purchase, carry it home in your own bag to save natural resources and decrease the clutter of excess bags.

Informational Article

In the United States, packaging accounts for 50% of all paper produced, 90% of all glass, 11% of all aluminum, and 3% of all energy used. Packaging makes up 50% by volume and 30% by weight of trash. Excessive packaging also increases the cost of products and those costs are passed on to consumers. For instance, mixing your favorite sports drink using a powder concentrate will cost about one-third what you would pay for a pre-mixed bottle of sports drink. A snack-sized container of potato chips will cost about twice as much as buying the chips in a larger bag.

To reduce packaging waste and costs, buy items in bulk or purchase them in large, single-layer containers, and avoid individually wrapped packages. When you need a smaller amount for a lunch or snack, take the food from the large container and place it in a smaller, reusable container. Liquids, such as laundry soap, dish soap,



and drinks, are often available in concentrates, which will also save money and produce less waste.

Once you've made your purchase, take it home in your own bag, instead of taking plastic or paper at the store.

Tips on how to Reduce Packaging Waste

Purchase beverages and other items in concentrates and add your own water. Not only will you save money and reduce waste, you will have less weight to carry home from the grocery store.



The sports drink powder in the foreground (Price: \$4.29) makes the same amount of drink as eleven of the single-serve 24 oz. bottles (Price: \$12.45).

Avoid single-serving products in favor of larger servings or buying in bulk.



The bag of cookies (Price: \$2.79) holds the same amount as the four individual cookie containers (Price: \$5.96) and creates much less waste.

Take your own cloth bag so that you don't need paper or plastic.

Visit RethinkRecycling.com to find packaging reduction tips and more information on waste reduction.

Suggested Activities

1. Packaging demonstration

Acquire examples of the same food and drink products wrapped in different packaging (see list in "Statistics & Facts" section). Distribute a "least waste" and "most waste" example to each person or small group in your audience. Ask them to compare the choices they have. Collect all the items in two laundry baskets (one for "least waste" and one for "most") and determine the total cost for all the least and most waste examples, and discuss the difference in waste.



Discuss why items are wrapped in individual containers and the price we pay for convenience. Discuss alternatives to buying individually wrapped containers.

The least waste items in the left basket cost 60% less than the same food and drink in the other basket and produce less waste.

2. Bag Challenge

See who can use a bag the most times on trips to the store – reward them with a new canvas bag or something else reusable.

3. Snack Challenge

Host a no-waste or low-waste snack event and calculate how much money is saved by using large bags/boxes versus individually wrapped items. Spend some of the savings on something for the group. Hint: placing snack items in containers such as ice cream cones results in no waste.



4. Grocery Store Assignment

Using this five-part packaging assignment, you will be able to see how choices made at the grocery store influence how much waste we make and how much money we spend on food.

1. Look around the grocery store for two food items that require no packaging. What are they and why don't they need packaging?
 - A. _____
 - B. _____
2. Find two containers that could be used again. Answer the following: (a) What product was in the container, and (b) What else could the container be used for?

Container 1: a. _____

b. _____

Container 2: a. _____

b. _____

3. Price one item sold in bulk. Compare the cost of that item per pound when purchased in bulk to the same quantity sold pre-packaged. Fill in the blanks below with your findings.

The product I chose to compare is _____.

The cost per pound in bulk is \$_____. (*note there may be a cost per ounce on the shelf tag. To convert to the cost per pound multiply the cost per ounce by 16.)



The cost per pound pre-packaged is _____.
 Buying this product prepackaged/in bulk (**circle one**) is a better value because it saves \$ _____ per pound.

4. Find the **same** food or drink that comes in different packages (example: juice concentrate and juice boxes or a snack in large containers and the same snack in individual servings). Compare the price per ounce.

Name of Product _____

\$/oz. for large package _____ \$/oz. for small package _____

Which package is a better choice? _____
 Why? _____

5. The grocery store offers different bagging alternatives. Which do you think is better for the environment, paper or plastic bags or do you have a better choice? _____
 Why? _____

Statistics & Facts

Product	\$* Least Price	\$* Most	\$ Diff.
Sunny D	\$1.69 (64 oz jug)	\$3.49 (individual bottles)	\$1.80
Pringles	\$1.45 (6 oz cylinder)	\$3.19 (Snack packs)	\$1.74
Oreos	\$2.79 (1 lb bag)	\$5.96 (4 oz. "go-packs")	\$3.17
Goldfish	\$3.14 (family-sized box)	\$6.05 (Goldfish on the Go)	\$2.91
Animal Crackers	\$2.49 (1 lb bag)	\$7.12 (2 oz. boxes)	\$4.63
Gatorade	\$4.29 (2 gallon concentrate)	\$12.45 (24 oz. bottles)	\$8.16
Cereal	\$3.29 (15 oz box)	\$8.90 (1.5 oz bowls)	\$5.61
Cheetos	\$2.49 (9.5 oz bag)	\$5.56 (2 oz. "go-snacks")	\$3.07
Popcorn	\$1.29 (2 lb bag)	\$5.67 (microwave boxes)	\$4.38
Raisins	\$1.99 (24 oz bag)	\$2.61 (1 oz. boxes)	\$0.62
Milano Cookies	\$2.24 (6 oz bag)	\$6.23 (.9 oz bags)	\$3.99
Koolaid	\$0.69 (64 oz powder)	\$2.39 (6.75 oz bottles)	\$1.70
TOTAL	\$27.84	\$69.62.	\$41.78

* all prices have been adjusted to reflect the same amount of product in each comparison All prices current as of 2006.



Resources

www.RethinkRecycling.com – Residents and businesses can learn how to create less waste, recycle more and properly dispose of hazardous items.

RethinkRecycling.com is sponsored by the metro region's Solid Waste Management Coordinating Board (SWMCB), comprised of the six member counties, and the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency.

How to Reduce Waste While Shopping link and print resource available from the MPCA. Contact resource center staff at clearinghouse@pca.state.mn.us or by phone 651-215-0232 or by web www.reduce.org

For additional activities that help teach students about packaging, visit:
www.ciwmb.ca.gov/schools/curriculum/CTL/46Module/Unit2/Lesson4.pdf