

## REDUCING OUR WASTE TO IMPROVE THE ENVIRONMENT

### Reduce, Reuse, Recycle & Repair

The Environment Committee urges everyone to take waste reduction seriously. Visits in 2019 to a large recycling facility in Southfield (RRRASOC), MSU Recycling, and the commercial recycler Friedland Industries in Lansing, added to our own research, resulted in our following quick takeaways on how to manage one's "trash" with the environment in mind:

- Eliminating plastic bags and plastic, non-returnable bottles is essential. These two items account for the major contamination to our land and water. Neither is currently profitable in the secondary recycling market, hence most go into landfills or find their way into our water system where they remain over multiple lifetimes. Bring your own sturdy reusable bags to the grocery and reusable lightweight mesh bags or old, clean plastic bags for produce.
- Tap water is more regulated than bottled water. Carry your tap or filtered water with you in stainless steel or glass containers. Michigan is one of 10 states that have a bottle return law. Sadly, Michigan also has a very low recycling rate compared with other states. If it weren't for our bottle bill, Michigan would only be recycling 5% versus the presently disappointing 15% of our waste.
- To be acceptable at recycling facilities, **food containers must be clean**. Otherwise good intentions can end up contaminating large batches of recyclables, meaning all of it could end up in a landfill instead of being recycled. Consider cleaning empty jars or plastic tubs in your dishwasher. Labels can remain.
- There are profitable secondary markets for metal and paper recycling. Aluminum can be recycled indefinitely; paper's fibers are shortened with each recycling so there is a limit, but white office paper has real value.
- Recycling facilities work by weight and are limited by space—more reasons why recycling facilities (besides Dart Container, the City of East Lansing and a few others) do not take polystyrene (#6)/Styrofoam.
- MSU Recycling on campus is public and takes a wide range of products. Check their website—and visit their surplus store. [www.msurecycling.com](http://www.msurecycling.com)
- You've reduced, reused and recycled, but consider another 'R'—**Rot**. Rather than put food wastes in the garbage, learn how to compost them with yard waste and turn them

into the perfect garden fertilizer. [https://www.michigan.gov/documents/deq/deq-whmd-swp-HomeComposting\\_247546\\_7.pdf](https://www.michigan.gov/documents/deq/deq-whmd-swp-HomeComposting_247546_7.pdf)

- Use Facebook's Marketplace or Craigslist to advertise goods you could sell or offer for free or to find used products you may want to buy. There is no charge for advertising. Marketplace is safer as the members are vetted through Facebook, plus a mileage filter is available to determine distance from the item you wish to buy. You can also try freecycle.org, both to give things away and to find needed items.
- Consider renting or borrowing/sharing seldom used or expensive items or equipment. Some neighborhoods and communities create borrowing clubs, and libraries are beginning to lend tools, toys and more.
- Try to buy natural fabrics when purchasing clothes, and consider buying from resale shops, which are growing in popularity. The apparel industry accounts for 10% of global carbon emissions and is the largest industrial polluter, second only to oil. The apparel market, a *\$3 trillion* global industry, produces synthetics like polyester fiber, which takes 200 years to decompose. Consider patronizing clothing companies that offer resale programs or have made big commitments to our environment (Google Patagonia, Eileen Fisher and H&M, among others.) <https://www.clothingmatters.net/critical-reading.html>
- An increasing variety of ecological products are becoming available at grocery stores and online made from recycled, compostable or biodegradable materials, like fabrics coated in beeswax for wrapping food. **Avoid purchasing heavily packaged items whenever possible.** Our collective purchasing behavior influences suppliers and retail outlets.
- One more 'R': **Repair!** Don't throw away what can be fixed—if not by you than by someone earning a living doing so. A Throw-Away Society is not sustainable!
- Eating Out: Try eliminating plastic straws, utensils and stirrers and even synthetic restaurant takeaway-boxes. All are single use and remain in the environment for generations. No profitable secondary market currently exists for recycling any of these items. Instead, carry your own glass or metal straw (if you need one); your own mug; sturdy, reusable spork/cutlery (check out eco-friendly options online); and your own container (reusable plastic or silicon, for example). This will be a big change in our behavior but can be discreet by carrying these items in a purse or supplemental bag. As with parenting, one can subtly model good environmental behavior 😊.
- Above all, buying less helps the environment!!! Buying less means more storage space PLUS more disposable income -- to positively impact other areas of your life!!!

Check out the Recycling 101 info sheet from EGLE (formerly the DEQ):

[https://www.michigan.gov/documents/deq/DEQ\\_Recycling101\\_web\\_511597\\_7.pdf](https://www.michigan.gov/documents/deq/DEQ_Recycling101_web_511597_7.pdf)