

NEWS

you can use

Texas Commission on Environmental Quality ♦ MC-113 ♦ PO Box 13087 ♦ Austin TX 78711-3087

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Tips for Reducing Holiday Waste

Every year, the holiday season winds down and thousands of paper and plastic shopping bags and gift bags end up in landfills. There are many ways to reduce the number of bags thrown out:

- Bring reusable cloth bags for holiday gift shopping.
- Tell store clerks you don't need a bag for small or oversized purchases.



- Wrap gifts in recycled or reused wrapping paper.
- Remember to save or recycle used wrapping paper.
- Give gifts that don't require much packaging, such as concert tickets, bus passes, or gift certificates.
- Send recycled-content greeting cards to reduce the amount of virgin paper used during the holidays.

- To reduce paper waste, send electronic greeting cards.

BATTERIES and ELECTRICITY

- Buy rechargeable batteries to accompany your electronic gifts, and consider giving a battery charger as well. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) about 40 percent of all battery sales occur during the holiday season, and those batteries also end up in landfills. Rechargeable batteries can last hundreds of times longer than single-use batteries, reducing the amount of potentially harmful materials thrown away, and saving considerable expense in the long run.
- Turn off or unplug holiday lights during the day. Doing so will not only save energy, but will also help your lights last longer.

TREES

- The EPA reports approximately 33 million live Christmas trees are sold in North America every year. After the holidays, look for ways to recycle your tree instead of sending it to a landfill. Check

with your community solid waste department and find out if it collects and mulches trees.

- To help prevent waste resulting from cutting down and disposing of live trees, consider buying a potted tree and planting it after the holidays.

DECOR AND GIFTS

- Have a create-your-own-decorations party! Invite family and friends to create and use holiday decorations such as ornaments made from old greeting cards or cookie dough, garlands made from strung popcorn or cranberries, wreaths made from artificial greens and flowers, and potpourri made from kitchen spices such as cinnamon and cloves.
- Consider the durability of a product before you buy it as a gift. Cheaper, less durable items often wear out quickly, creating waste and costing you money.
- Use your own camera instead of a disposable one to reduce waste while capturing holiday memories. Better yet, buy a digital camera so that you don't have to use film at all and only print the pictures you want to keep.

Drive Clean Across Texas

Drive Clean Across Texas Offers Two New Publications

What would you do to protect your children's health and your own? Most people go to great lengths, but many also miss some of the most basic opportunities. Are you doing the best that you can?

Drive Clean Across Texas, a campaign sponsored by the TCEQ and the Texas Department of Transportation, teaches that car care is an integral part of reducing air pollution. Exhaust and leaking fuels from improperly maintained vehicles are prime contributors to air pollution, which can cause asthma attacks and other breathing ailments for children, seniors, and others.

Drive Clean Across Texas offers free to the public a poster and brochure that explain how the condition of your

vehicle and your driving habits affect the amount of air pollution you produce. “*For Their Sake ... and Yours*,” (GI-329 brochure and GI-330 poster) can be ordered from the TCEQ. To view them before ordering, visit www.tceq.state.tx.us/comm_exec/forms_pubs/pubs/gi/gi-329.html and www.tceq.state.tx.us/comm_exec/forms_pubs/pubs/gi/gi-330.html.

The information is easy to understand and provides clear advice on how to reduce individual contributions to air pollution. The collective effort of all Texans is needed to fight this threat to our health. Please order your copies today, and do your part for clean air!

Picking up the Tab: Helping Employees Get to Work

We all know that more can be done to promote air quality in Texas’ largest communities. Because the cars we drive can be the most significant source of air pollutants in Texas,



the millions of miles employees drive each day on their workday commutes can represent the greatest impact most Texans will likely have on their environment.

In conjunction with community efforts to improve air quality, many employers promote com-

mute alternatives such as carpools, vanpools, and public transit. However, many employers are not aware of additional tools such as “qualified transportation benefits” that are available to them to encourage employees to participate while also saving them money on their daily commutes.

The Internal Revenue Code authorizes employers to provide three main types of benefits, including:

- **Employer-Paid Benefit**

Under this alternative, employers pay the full amount of the employee’s transit costs. In turn, this benefit (which would amount to a salary boost) does not count against the employee’s taxable income. As a result, employer-paid transit benefits calculate to a greater salary increase when compared with a straight-wage or salary enhancement of equal value.

- **Employee-Paid Pre-Tax Benefit**

Not all employers can afford to help cover employee transportation costs. By establishing a pre-tax deduction program, employees can exchange a portion of their gross income for an employer-provided transit or vanpool pass. The employee will save on federal payroll and income taxes because the amount of the transit cost is not considered or reported as taxable salary.

The qualified transportation pre-tax benefit is exempt from many of the complex use restrictions common to other flexible spending accounts. As a

result, a company will not have to write a plan document or obtain IRS approval for this benefit. Additionally, a pre-tax program can be started any time of the year.

- **“Fare Share” Benefit**

Under this alternative, the employer and the employee share transit costs. Employers can subsidize a portion of monthly transit costs while providing employees the option of paying for transit costs through pre-tax deductions. For example, with a maximum annual benefit of \$65, an employer could subsidize \$40 of the employee’s transit costs, leaving the employee with \$25 to cover using a pre-tax deduction.

For more information on qualified transportation benefits and to find out more from the Commuter Choice Toolkit, visit the Federal Transit Administration online at www.fta.dot.gov/2217_ENG_HTML.htm.

Industry Top Performers Eligible for Regulatory Incentives

Clean Texas, Cleaner World national environmental leaders Ryan Bayer and Ruben Velasquez of Austin-based Applied Materials Company praised TCEQ’s new expedited permitting incentive at the quarterly Environmental Performance Partnership meeting for CLEAN TEXAS, CLEANER WORLD (CTCW) stakeholders. The meeting was held at the TCEQ on September 21, 2005. The new incentive is offered to CTCW national environmental leaders that have TCEQ-certified environmental management systems.

Applied Materials is the first company to use the expedited permitting incentive for an air permit renewal. Applied Materials representatives said that “overall, the permit time has decreased dramatically.” According to Bayer, “The permit was submitted on June 29 and the next day the draft public notice package was received. By July 5, the final public notice was issued and the application was complete.” Applied Materials representatives also noted that the technical review process and public comment periods were swift and smooth, taking only 84 days to complete the process. Previously, “permits could take anywhere from six to eight months to complete,” explains Ruben Velasquez.

In addition, Applied Materials representatives say that the reduction in permitting time will definitely lead to cost savings for the site and the company is pleased that expedited permitting is now offered to qualified businesses.

For more information on the CTCW National Leader Program, visit www.tceq.state.tx.us/assistance/ems/CleanTexasCleanerWorld.html.



Minimize the Environmental Impacts of What You Buy

Interested in testing an Internet tool that helps users buy environmentally friendly products? Clean Texas, Cleaner World needs your help. The TCEQ program has teamed up with a Harvard University professor to create an online tool that will measure the environmental impacts of the products you purchase. When completed, the tool will allow you to prioritize your environmental purchasing and get the biggest, positive environmental bang for your buck.

The tool will be made available in the public domain and will be downloadable and FREE to users worldwide. If you are interested in testing how this tool can help your business, contact Mike Lindner at 512/239-3045 (or e-mail mlindner@tceq.state.tx.us).

Texas Country Cleanups Scheduled for January

The TCEQ is holding free, one-day collections for rural Texans in South Texas. Citizens can bring their used oil, oil filters, batteries, and empty pesticide containers for recycling or disposal. For more information, visit www.tceq.state.tx.us/assistance/TXcountry/tx_centry.html.

City	Date
Los Fresnos	1/09
Elsa	1/10
Alice	1/11
Beeville	1/12

City	Date
Boerne	1/23
Castroville	1/24
Jourdanton	1/25
Kennedy	1/26
Seguin	1/27

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