

Western Finger Lakes Solid Waste Management Authority

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Piles of Trash – Time to React!

A local newspaper recently featured a front-page article concerning the mountains of trash following the Christmas holidays. Increased trash and recycling are features that all the collectors recognize all too well following the holidays.

The good news for the Western Finger Lakes Authority and other recycling organizations is that increased amounts of recycling results in increased revenues for the sale of materials.

However, the larger point is that individuals can make a tremendous difference in the amount of materials they have to set out for trash and for recycling. This difference starts not in the house after a shopping trip, but at the store or even with the list before shopping. “Pre-cycling” is the way to cut down on the trash that we have not only at Christmas, but all year around. By making choices when we make our purchases each of us can make sure that we have less trash overall and more to recycle.

The first choice we can make is to bring our own shopping bags when we go to the store. By keeping a few shopping bags in the car, we have a bag available in case we stop for that one quick, last-minute item. If we choose not to take another plastic shopping bag, that is one less bag to either recycle or dispose of.

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In addition, when possible, we can choose items with less packaging. If we have a choice between an item with layers of packaging and an item with less packaging, the latter is the first choice.

It may seem like a small choice like a plastic shopping bag would not make a very big difference. That is incorrect. Most people do not realize how much waste is created, not only when the product or packaging reaches our houses, but long before. According to waste industry experts, for each ton of trash we create, 71 tons of waste are created getting the materials into our hands. The US EPA estimates that each person creates around 4 pounds of trash each day. That means that we are responsible for nearly 300 pounds of waste to create that trash every single day.

But to return to our holiday shopping, it is difficult when someone we love has requested a particular item, made by a particular company, and that item only comes protected in layers and layers of unrecyclable packaging. In that case, the action we can take will be prevention for a next purchase. We can write or call the company. Let them know that their product is our first choice, but their packaging is our last choice. If makers of popular toys, electronics and other products hear from their customers, they will make changes. It is up to us to react, to let manufacturers know that we care about the packing we are left with.

So the familiar mantra of “Reduce. Reuse. Recycle.” has a fourth element: React! If you have a question or concern about recycling, especially in Wayne or Yates Counties, please call the Western Finger Lakes Solid Waste Management Authority, 1.800.724.3867 or check our website, www.wfingerlakesauthority.org.