



KY-A-Syst for the Home

Environmental Stewardship for Homeowners

Managing Household Waste: Preventing, Re-Using, Recycling, and Composting

Why Should You Be Concerned?

The United States is number one in the world in waste produced, energy consumed, and use of the earth's natural resources. We use more than our share of the world's resources and often turn those resources into waste or unusable products.

As the U.S. population increases, so does the amount of waste produced in this country each year. Studies show that in 1996, each person produced an average of 4.3 pounds of waste each day—a significant increase from an average of 2.7 pounds produced daily by each person in 1960.

Changing from a resource-consuming lifestyle to a resource-conserving one would help maintain natural resources and create less waste.

How Can KY-A-Syst Help?

This publication can help you evaluate how you manage household waste and reduce the amount you throw away. Producing less waste and finding creative ways to deal with waste not only saves taxpayer dollars, it helps protect air, soil, water quality, and the health of both people and wildlife.

After you have read this publication, walk around your home and property and answer the questions in the boxes. Your answers will help you pinpoint problem areas. If you answer a question with choice A, you do a good job of reducing household waste. If you answer a question with choice B, you are sometimes aware of how much waste you generate. If you answer a question with choice C, you will want to consider making changes in how you manage household waste.

If you would like further help in assessing your management of household waste and related activities, please contact your local office of the Cooperative Extension Service.

Consider Quantity When Making Purchases

A good price or bulk packaging may tempt you to buy more paint, food, or household cleaner than you really need, but an important part of becoming a waste-conscious shopper is buying only what you need. Unused or spoiled product may end up being thrown away, which wastes money and natural resources. Make sure you can use up what you buy, or find someone who can use your leftovers.

In what quantities do you purchase products?

- A. I buy only what I need, and I avoid accumulating unused products.
- B. I sometimes buy more of a product than I can use.
- C. I often buy more of a product than I can use.

Purchase Long-Lasting and Re-Usable Products

In our throw-away society, it is sometimes hard to find good-quality products at an affordable price. Although durable products may be more expensive, in the long run they are usually a better investment. Look for products that can be fixed when broken. Also, to save money and conserve resources, look for products and materials that can be re-used (either passed along to someone else or used for other purposes). For example, re-usable gift bags can reduce your need to buy wrapping paper.

Do you purchase long-lasting and durable products?

- A. I select products based on their durability, ease of repair, and potential for re-use.
- B. I sometimes consider durability, ease of repair, or potential for re-use.
- C. I never consider durability, ease of repair, or potential for re-use.

Product Packaging

Many product containers and packaging materials are potentially recyclable, such as glass bottles, paper, plastic bags, and cardboard boxes. Look for the chasing arrow symbol when shopping, shown at left. This symbol means the product or packaging is recyclable. Check with your local recycling center for items it will accept.

If your local center does not accept all items, you may consider taking them to a neighboring community's recycling center. Combine trips to recycling facilities with other tasks so



you will not waste more natural resources, such as gasoline, than you will save by recycling.

Are the products you buy in recyclable packaging?

- A. I regularly purchase containers/packaging that can be recycled.
- B. I sometimes consider recyclability when making purchases.
- C. I never consider recyclability.

Buying Items with Recycled Content

As a consumer, you can use your buying power to support products made from recycled materials. Everything from carpet to detergent bottles can be made from recycled material. On product packaging, look for the words *Made from Recycled Materials* or *Made from Post-Consumer Recycled Materials*.

Post-consumer means that all or part of the product or packaging is made from materials that have been recycled by consumers in community recycling programs. For example, each year billions of recycled aluminum beverage cans are melted down and made into new cans.

Do you purchase items made from recycled materials?

- A. I regularly look for products and/or packaging made from recycled materials, and I purchase them even if the price is a little higher.
- B. I occasionally look for and purchase products and/or packaging made from recycled materials.
- C. I do not look for or purchase products and/or packaging made from recycled materials.

Minimizing Packaging

Although packaging serves many purposes, such as preventing food spoilage, ensuring customer safety, meeting legal requirements, and providing information, some packaging is unnecessary, wastes natural resources, and ends up as waste soon after purchase. Waste-conscious shopping includes choosing products that have the least amount of wrapping (as long as your safety is assured). Examples of minimizing waste from packaging are buying bulk foods (if they will not be wasted) and buying concentrated products.

Do you buy products with the least amount of packaging?

- A. When it is safe to do so, I select packaging that minimizes waste.
- B. I sometimes consider packaging that minimizes waste.
- C. I never consider packaging that minimizes waste.

Re-Using Your Household Waste Items

With household waste items, re-use should be your first aim because it typically has the least environmental impact. Glass beverage bottles that are refillable are an example of a re-usable product. You can usually find uses for more materials than you realize—only the imagination limits re-use. Sharing old clothes and used furniture is a common form of re-use. If you cannot share with friends or family, try to donate items to organizations that have thrift shops. Have a yard sale, give foam “peanut” packaging to a local gift shop, or see if neighbors can use your excess paint, lumber, or other materials. Re-using an item is a great way to save natural resources.

Do you re-use household waste items?

- A. I re-use as many household waste items as possible.
- B. I re-use items when it is convenient.
- C. I never re-use items.

Recycling

Studies have shown that more than half of all household wastes is recyclable. Recycling does require energy and other resources and produce waste and pollution, but pollution and use of resources are typically less than when items are produced from virgin materials.

Check with the recycling program or center in your area to see what is recycled, where items are recycled, and how to prepare items for recycling. Also, your county judge executive or solid waste coordinator can provide information about recycling and options for waste disposal in your community. Use the chart *What Can You Recycle in Your Area?* on page 3 to stay current about what your local program will accept.

How much do you recycle?

- A. I recycle as many household waste items as possible.
- B. I recycle when it is convenient.
- C. I never recycle.

Composting

Yard trimmings and food wastes typically make up 10 to 25 percent of the wastes going into landfills. Composting—nature’s recycling—is a much more effective way to handle organic waste than sending it to landfills because composting is a natural process that turns kitchen, yard, and garden wastes into a high-quality soil conditioner. Many common materials can be composted in your own backyard: leaves, grass clippings, straw, some kitchen scraps (but not animal wastes like fat, bone, or pet manure), and even small amounts of paper. The final product is a dark brown, crumbly compost with a clean, earthy scent. It can be spread on lawns or mixed with garden soil as an excellent natural soil conditioner. To compost at home, you can use one of the many composting bins on the market, or you can build your own. Your local office of the Cooperative Extension Service can provide plans for building compost structures and more information about composting.

What Can You Recycle in Your Area?		
Item	Where can it be recycled?	How should it be prepared (such as labels removed, rinsed, bundled, etc.)?
Paper/cardboard		
Glass		
Plastic		
Aluminum		
Steel		
Other metals		
Automobile batteries		
Oil		
Tires		
White goods/appliances		
Wood/lumber		
Bricks/concrete		
Other		

Do you compost yard and garden waste and kitchen vegetable scraps?

- C. I compost all yard and garden waste and kitchen vegetable scraps at home or through a community program.
- D. I compost some yard, garden, and kitchen waste.
- E. I never compost.

Burning Household Waste

Some people use burning as a way to get rid of household waste. When some wastes, such as plastics, batteries, and printing inks, are burned, noxious chemicals can be released into the air. Some of these chemicals—lead and mercury, for example—can be hazardous to breathe. Eventually, most by-products from burning are removed from the air by rain or snow and deposited on land or in water.

Most states have passed laws to restrict burning of household waste or what you can burn because of concern about depositing of hazardous air pollutants. The Kentucky Division for Air Quality regulates open burning at the state level and does allow the burning of household rubbish. However:

- Household rubbish to be burned in the open should not contain plastic, rubber products, paints, treated lumber, household chemicals, or animal and vegetable matter.
- Household rubbish fires can be burned only by residents of towns with a population of less than 8,000.
- Burning household rubbish is banned from May to September in Boone, Kenton, and Campbell counties and parts of Oldham and Bullitt counties.

Burning of trash also is subject to restrictions of other agencies and local governments. You should always check with city and/or county officials before setting a fire. The Kentucky Division of Waste Management recommends subscribing to a garbage pickup service as an alternative to burning trash.

Do you burn household waste?

- A. No household waste is burned on site.
- B. Only nontoxic materials are burned. I have checked with local officials, and I follow all regulations on burning waste.
- C. Mixtures of waste are burned, releasing metals, acids, and chlorine compounds. I have not checked/ do not follow regulations on burning.

On-Site Waste Dumps

Always keep in mind that Kentucky law prohibits throwing away your own garbage on your property or allowing others to dump on your property. Waste dumped on your property is not only unsightly, it may contain harmful chemicals. These chemicals can be spread by wind and rain, or they can soak into the soil, pollute well water, and find their way into nearby lakes, streams, or wetlands.

Used oil filters usually harbor petroleum products and harmful metals. Used pesticide containers, if not properly rinsed, may contain toxic residue. Used pesticide containers can be disposed of through rinse and return programs. Your county Extension office can provide you with details about these programs. The Kentucky Department of Agriculture also will assist you in disposing of unwanted agricultural chemicals on your property.

Discarded tires, used oil, antifreeze, and household chemicals also are hazardous if not disposed of properly. Additional sources of information about the wastes described here are listed below.

Do you dump household waste on site?

A. No household waste is dumped on my property or on public property.

B. A limited amount of nontoxic household waste has been/is dumped on my property.

C. Household wastes and liquids, appliances, tires, and other junk are dumped on site.

For More Information About . . .

- **Shopping to Reduce Waste**
– *Enviroshopping: Buy Smart!* (ENRI-300) by Linda Reece Adler, University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service.
– County office of the Cooperative Extension Service (check local listing).
- **Recycling**
– *How to Recycle: Beginning Recycling at Home* (ENRI-315) by Laura Stephenson and Pat Curtsinger, University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service.
– Your county judge executive or solid waste coordinator (check local listing).
- **Composting**
– *Home Composting: A Guide to Managing Organic Wastes* (HO-75) by W.M. Fountain, Candace Harker, Richard Warner, and Terry K. Hutchens, University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service.

- County office of Cooperative Extension Service (check local listing).
- **Burning Laws and Regulations**
– Kentucky Division of Air Quality (502-573-3382).
- **Battery Recycling**
– Battery Recharging and Recycling Center for Kentucky (1-800-822-8837, code 1).
- **Motor Oil Recycling**
– Local service stations and auto parts stores (check local listing).
- **Pesticide Container Recycling**
– Kentucky Department of Agriculture, Division of Pesticides Rinse and Return Program (502-564-7274).
– County office of the Cooperative Extension Service (check local listing).
- **Unwanted Chemical Collection Program**
– Kentucky Department of Agriculture, Division of Pesticides (1-800-205-6543).
- **Tire Disposal**
– Kentucky Division of Waste Management (502-564-6716 or visit its Web site at <<http://www.nr.state.ky.us/nrepc//dep/waste/programs/tires/tires.htm>>).



Home "A" Syst

What Is the KY-A-Syst for the Home program?

The KY-A-Syst for the Home program is a series of publications that can help you be a good environmental steward of Kentucky and protect the health and well-being of your family. KY-A-Syst for the Home publications provide problem-solving information and list agencies that can provide help in specific areas.

Action Checklist

Look back at the assessment questions, and make sure you have answered all questions. Record all B and C responses, and list the improvements or changes you plan to make. You can use recommendations from this publication or from other sources to help you decide on action you are likely to take. Write down a date to keep you on schedule. Read back through the assessment questions from time to time to see if any responses have changed, and take any action needed to address new concerns.

Write all B and C responses below.	What can you do to reduce risk?	Set a target date for action.
<i>Sample:</i> I never re-use items.	Begin looking for ways to re-use household waste items.	Begin immediately and continue.

This publication is based on *Home*A*Syst: An Environmental Risk-Assessment Guide for the Home* developed by the National Farm*A*Syst/Home*A*Syst Program (authors Shirley Niemeyer, University of Nebraska-Lincoln; Michael P. Vogel, Montana State University Extension Service; and Kathleen Parrott, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University) in cooperation with NRAES, the Northeast Regional Agricultural Engineering Service. Permission to use these materials was granted by the University of Wisconsin, the copyright holder. Kentucky's modification of Home*A*Syst was coordinated by Kimberly Henken, Amanda Abnee, and Marla Hall. Technical editing was provided by Linda M. Heaton, Linda R. Adler, and Jennifer Cocanougher. This material is based upon work supported by the Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, under special project number 99-EWQI-10515.

Contact: Kimberly Henken, Extension Associate, Family and Consumer Sciences