

Go Green from the Senior Perspective...

Some young people today think the current “Go Green” or recycling programs are relatively a new concept but those of us 50+ in age as well as our parents and grandparents have been doing this for years. During World War II my mother remembers cutting up and flattening tin cans, using sugar and gasoline ration coupons and all tires were turned in for reuse. I remember hanging clothes with my mother (in the basement during the winter), washing out the glass milk bottles to give back to the milkman and helping my grandmother cut up and roll rags to make rugs (I still have one in my garage). My mother-in-law always had a large compost pile she used in her garden, and she saved every button, zipper, jar and plastic bag for reuse. We had almost no garbage or city landfills as what we could not reuse we burned in a large barrel. My father built our cottage almost completely with recycled materials including windows, bricks, nails and even the wood paneling was from the trees he cut down for the cottage site. Today’s manta “Reduce, Reuse, Recycle” was the everyday living theme almost 100 years ago.

What has changed are the reasons or motivation behind the “Reduce, Reuse, Recycle” movement. Years ago we did it primarily because of economics and the limited access we had to products as more of us lived in rural areas and there were fewer stores, brands, and advertising. Commercialism began in earnest after World War II. Today we realize that our world’s natural resources are being depleted and the world’s population is growing. Planet Earth is being negatively affected by how we dispose of hazardous materials or put our garbage in landfills as at some point the waste will spill into our farming areas, forests, and water sources. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates that we could recycle as much as 85% of our total solid waste. Other interesting EPA statistics about the U.S. include:

- Each person creates about 4.7 pounds of waste daily or about 600 times their adult weight in garbage throughout their lifetime.
- Today almost 1/3 of total waste is recycled whereas about half of all paper products are now recycled, up to 2/3 of yard waste is composted, and 1/3 of metals are recycled.
- There are almost 9,000 curbside recycling programs (all major Great Lakes Bay regional cities have these).
- We have 5% of the world’s population but use 25% of its natural resources.
- We use 4 million plastic bottles every hour but only 25% of plastic bottles get recycled.
- Disposal of waste to landfills has decreased from 89% in 1980 to 54% in the year 2007.
- The amount of recycling in 2007 saved the energy equivalent of 10.7 billion gallons of gasoline and prevented the release of carbon dioxide equal to approximately 35 million cars.
- About 80% of what Americans throw away is recyclable.

Statistics aside, the best reasons to conscientiously recycle are: saves energy; conserves our valuable natural resources; promotes clean air and water; saves landfill space; reduces

pollution; can save money and create jobs; promotes the “Keep America Beautiful” campaign as it reduces litter and garbage along our highways, in our forests, on our beaches, etc.

The newest campaign is titled Call2Recycle® and it challenges North Americans to recycle 1 million pounds of rechargeable batteries between July and October, 2010. Locally Lowe’s, Home Depot, Sears, RadioShack and Staples are drop-off locations for batteries as well as old mobile/cell phones. You can also go on-line to find all locations in your zip code area. The website is www.call2recycle.org

You no doubt saved to buy your home, saved for special vacations and events and may even have saved for your children’s and grandchildren’s college educations. Money is one personal resource that you saved but you can also apply the same principles to saving some of the world’s natural resources for future generations to use and enjoy. Recycling is of course an obvious choice but there are many, many other things you can do in your daily life that also can contribute to saving resources. A few examples include: lower the temperature on your hot water heater; unplug unused chargers and appliances including your computer; turn off lights when you leave the room and use natural light from windows for as long as you can; wash laundry in cool water instead of hot; fix leaky faucets; put a stop to unsolicited mail, sign up to opt out of pre-screened credit card offers, and pay as many bills as possible online; stop using disposable plastic bags from grocery stores; donate to and shop at thrift stores such as Goodwill and Salvation Army, etc., etc.

The Delta College [50+...Just Like Gold Program offers monthly “Bits and Bites” sessions](#) (the format is a bit of information along with a bite to eat) that will introduce you to new topics, new options and new information. On Friday, September 17th the topic will be about recycling and related issues. Immediately after lunch we will be entertained by a Bay City Players group of senior men and women called “The Recyclables” who will present about 30 minutes of good natured merriment. This talented group will give you a humorous perspective on coping with the challenges of daily life focusing on life after 50. After laughing together we will continue the recycling theme by learning some ways of reducing our impact on this planet and creating a healthier, safer, cleaner and greener place to live. You are invited to join us at this program and are also encouraged to become a member of our *50+...Just Like Gold Program*.

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