

Twelve Days of Greenness

Recycling, reducing- energy, water and waste, these tips from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) old-habits replace.

Saturday December 13th, 2008

'Twas the holiday season and all through the state, Floridians learn to make holidays green but still great.

1st day of greenness: save energy, money. Use energy-saving LED lights for holiday decorating. Choosing Light Emitting Diodes (LEDs which are four watts per strand of 50) rather than traditional incandescent bulbs (300 watts per strand of 50) results in both energy and cost savings. LEDs have a lower wattage and generate less heat than traditional strands, increasing the lifespan of the bulbs and providing a safer method for illumination. Set LED lights on a timer for increased energy efficiency.



2nd day: wrap green. Use recycled or tree-free wrapping paper. Tree-free paper is available in woven grass, lokta, tree bark, banana fiber, spun silk, recycled office paper and recycled rag. After the holidays, keep used paper for reuse or recycle. Try giving gifts that don't require much packaging, such as gift cards, concert tickets or services.

3rd day: prevent pollution. Choose reusable bags rather than plastic or paper when holiday shopping. According to reusablebags.com, an estimated 500 billion to one trillion non-biodegradable plastic bags are consumed worldwide each year and are among the 12 items of debris most often found in coastal cleanups. Opting for a reusable shopping bag can prevent hundreds, if not thousands, of plastic bags from being used.

4th day: shop green. Consolidate shopping trips, shop locally or skip driving by shopping online. Choosing to cut down on travel reduces air pollution, fuel consumption and lowers costs. Shopping online also reduces the need for print catalogs and purchasing a downloadable item eliminates the need for any kind of material goods.

5th day: drive green. For most, driving is inevitable during the holiday season. Consider the following tips to drive green and save gas this holiday season:

- Keep tires properly inflated. This reduces tread wear and conserves fuel.
- Don't idle. It is estimated one minute of sitting in neutral or park uses the same amount of gas consumed as when starting the engine.
- Don't overfill. Gasoline vapors are a source of toxic air pollutants and spillage of gas from overfilling can contribute to air pollution.

6th day: give a green gift. Have a gift-giving dilemma? Try giving appliances that are eco-friendly and protect air quality such as an electric grill or lawn mower, rather than gas-powered appliances. These gifts save gas, money and reduce noise and air pollution. Using an electric mower costs about \$5 per year in electricity costs. Using a gas-powered lawn mower costs that much in just two cuts.

7th day: use green cleaners. When preparing for holiday guests, trade in harsh household cleaners for natural, non-toxic cleaners that are safer for both human health and the environment. Hundreds of environmentally friendly products are widely available through stores and the Internet. The Green Seal, EcoLabel or other third party certification assures environmentally friendly contents. Consumers can also create home-mixed cleaners with recipes available at: www.dep.state.fl.us/pollutionprevention/green_cleaning.htm.

8th day: choose green lodging. If traveling or hosting out of town guests, consider utilizing a designated Florida Green Lodge. Properties are located throughout the state and range from local bed and breakfasts to five star resorts with more than 1,000 rooms to suit any traveler's needs. Designated properties have implemented a variety of environmentally friendly practices. Visit www.dep.state.fl.us/greenlodging/lodges.htm to find the ideal Green Lodging property for holiday arrangements.

9th day: recycle electronics. If giving or receiving an electronic gift, be sure to recycle or properly dispose of unwanted used electronics. Electronics are one of the fastest growing portions of America's trash. Donating or selling old electronics to schools or charity organizations is a way to both help those in need and prevent harmful electronic waste from ending up in landfills. Before throwing away an old cell phone, call local county or city services to see if they accept donations, or if they recycle cell phones. For more information, visit: www.dep.state.fl.us/Waste/categories/electronics/default.htm.

10th day: choose to use rechargeable batteries. About 40 percent of all battery sales occur during the holiday season. Buy rechargeable batteries to accompany electronic gifts, and consider giving a battery charger as well. Rechargeable batteries reduce the amount of potentially harmful materials thrown away, and can save money in the long run.

11th day: experience green - visit a state park. Open 365 days a year, Florida's 160 state parks offer affordable holiday fun for all ages. Spanning more than 700,000 acres and 100 miles of sandy white beach, state parks offer a glimpse into natural Florida. Feeling the crunch this holiday season? With most state parks costing a mere \$4.00 per car, they are a great alternative to costly theme parks and offer activities for persons of all ages and abilities. For more information about Florida State Parks, visit www.floridastateparks.org.

12th day: holiday tree recycling. Floridians buy several hundred thousand trees each holiday season. This year, choose to prolong its usefulness by recycling or finding another use for the tree. Other uses include placing a tree in the yard for use by birds and other wildlife or pruning or chipping the branches for use as mulch. Local government offices or sanitation services should be contacted for information on holiday tree disposal programs. Some communities have central collection areas, while others collect the trees at curbside.

Green isn't just for the Grinch this year, saving water, energy and money makes everyone cheer. Hang up the LED lights with care, and breathe easier knowing they contribute to clean air. Take these simple steps to protect and conserve, Florida's environment you help to preserve.

For more of DEP's green tips, visit: www.dep.state.fl.us/green/tips/tips.htm#general.

To increase recycling throughout Florida, this summer Governor Charlie Crist signed the Energy, Climate Change, and Economic Security Act of 2008 into law which establishes a new statewide recycling goal of 75 percent to be achieved by 2020. Within the law, DEP is directed to develop a program to achieve this goal and submit it to the Florida Legislature for consideration by January 1, 2010. For more information on the new statewide recycling goal of 75 percent, and to share comments on ways to achieve this goal and view comments from others on our web-based forum, visit www.dep.state.fl.us/waste/recyclinggoal75/.

DEP's Office of Sustainable Initiatives is comprised of three voluntary, non-regulatory programs that assist Florida industry and citizens in protecting the environment. The Clean Marina Program, the Florida Green Lodging Program and the Florida Pollution Prevention Program offer a variety of services including on-site assessments, consultations, speakers and workshops, all at no cost to citizens or organizations. The goal of the Sustainable Initiatives programs is to meet the needs of the present population without compromising resources for future generations. To learn more about DEP's Sustainable Initiatives, visit www.dep.state.fl.us/green/.