

# Environmentally Responsible Consumer Guide

# Buy less

## Take Action

**Only buy** products that you need. Limit the purchase of convenience, non-essential, and luxury products. For example, don't buy disposable wipes or compost bin liners.

**Only buy** products that you will use regularly. Borrow or rent items that you use infrequently. For example, many tools can be rented.

**Curb the desire** to replace products just because a new feature is offered. Electronic items, such as cell phones, blackberries, and MP3 players, have become everyday items and new features are available regularly.

**Don't buy** new products to replace items and equipment that are showing age or are in need of repair. Repair or refurbish them instead. For example, replace the burner in your barbeque and reupholster furniture.

**Buy items** that do multiple tasks. For example, use multipurpose cleaners.

**Check expiry dates** before buying a product. Don't buy more than you can use before it expires. For example, don't buy the largest jar of mayonnaise if you will only use a cup before it expires.

**You can help** protect yourself, your family, and the environment by purchasing only what you need and limiting your purchases of non-essential and luxury items.

## Exploding consumerism... one of the most important issues globally.

North Americans purchase products on a daily basis. Some of these purchases are necessary while others are convenience and non-essential items. Everything we purchase today, whether it is a necessity or not, negatively impacts on land, water, air and natural ecosystems. Environmental damage occurs at all stages of the product's life cycle: from the extraction of raw materials, manufacturing, transport of the product to point of sale, the use of the product, and finally its disposal.

The problem of over-consumption in relation to the well-being of the global community shows startling inequity. The worldwide annual expenditure on cosmetics is estimated to be \$18 billion while the estimated expenditure required to eliminate hunger and malnutrition is \$19 billion. Annual expenditures on pet food in US and Europe is \$17 billion while the estimated cost of immunizing children, providing safe potable water, and worldwide literacy is approximately \$16 billion.<sup>1</sup>

More and more people are realizing that it is their responsibility to make changes. Thankfully there are many simple ways to make a change in your environmental footprint. Buying less and buying only what you need is the best way to reduce our impact on the environment. Other principles to follow include buying local, buying for life, buying recycled and buying product not packaging (for more information on these principles, see factsheet titled Environmentally Responsible Consumer's Guide: Shopping Tips for Everyday Household Items).

## Buy less!

By reducing your consumption, you will spend less money, reduce the amount of materials that are wasted making new products and packaging, and reduce the waste produced when these items are disposed. If you think about what you consume, you will get more value out of things that you own.

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NOVA SCOTIA

Environment

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# Environmentally Responsible Consumer Guide continued...

In Nova Scotia, even with our successful efforts in recycling, 429,000 tonnes of waste (approximately 477 kilograms or 1000 pounds per person) are sent to landfills annually. Generally, more disposable items and lower quality items are being purchased and we regularly purchase non-essential products. Estimates indicate that 80% of manufactured goods are disposed within six months of their production.<sup>2</sup> Additionally it is estimated that only 6% of extracted material resources are embodied in durable products. The remainder is converted to waste residuals at extraction and processing stages of the lifecycle of manufactured products.<sup>3</sup>

## Ask Questions

- Do I really need this?
- Is it a luxury? Is it a convenience item?
- Can I borrow this from somebody?
- Can I make this myself?

## Websites of Interest

The Story of Stuff: animation of consumerism-based society

[www.storyofstuff.com](http://www.storyofstuff.com)

State of the World. World Watch Institute

[www.worldwatch.org/files/pdf/SOW08\\_chapter\\_4\\_brief.pdf](http://www.worldwatch.org/files/pdf/SOW08_chapter_4_brief.pdf)

