

# Environmentally Responsible Consumer Guide

# Shopping Tips

## FOR EVERYDAY HOUSEHOLD ITEMS

### Take Action

The following are some general principles that can assist you in your quest for environmentally preferable purchases:

**Buy less**  
**Buy local**  
**Buy for life**  
**Buy recycled**  
**and**  
**Buy product**  
**not the**  
**packaging**

While these principles can be applied to all purchases the following examples and tips focus on everyday household purchases.

### 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 luxury items. All purchases have negative 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 to manufacturing, to transport of the product to point of sale, to the use of the product, and finally its disposal.

Begin by thinking about what you buy, how it's made and where it comes from. One obvious source of information for consumers is product labels. Manufacturers are aware of their environmental impact and consumers' interest in protecting the environment. One result has been that environmental claims on product labels are becoming more common. These claims should provide accurate and relevant information to allow customers to make meaningful comparisons. Claims should be clear, complete, and relevant and should indicate if they refer to the product or the packaging material.<sup>1</sup> On some types of products, you can look for third party environmental certification logos. These logos mean that environmental claims have been verified to ensure that they are accurate. Examples of common environmental certifications include, EcoLogo (cleaning products, paper products), Forest Stewardship Council (paper and wood products) and Energy Star (appliances and electronics).



Another source of information is the retailer or business owner. By asking questions, the business owner or manager is reminded that his customers are interested in purchasing environmentally responsible products. S/he may be able to direct you to environmentally responsible products located in the store or can order products that are of interest to his customers. If you do not ask, there is a reduced chance that these products will be supplied to you.

**NOVA SCOTIA**  
 Environment

# Environmentally Responsible Consumer Guide continued...

## Interested in purchasing local food products?

Find

***Food for Thought:  
A buyer's guide to  
local and seasonal  
Nova Scotia  
agri-food products***

at

[http://www.gov.ns.ca/  
agri/marketing/contact/  
agriculture/foodft/  
index.shtml](http://www.gov.ns.ca/agri/marketing/contact/agriculture/foodft/index.shtml)

Also check-out the Select Nova Scotia website at [www.selectnovascotia.ca](http://www.selectnovascotia.ca) when looking for local and seasonal food products.

Also look for the Select NS symbol.



## 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.

## Buy Local!

Buying local makes sense from an economical, social and environmental perspective. By seeking out local producers of food and goods, you are supporting local businesses. These local businesses are critical for the wellbeing of your community. By buying local, you can reduce the distance of transporting products. This reduces emissions of greenhouse gases and other air pollutants. Local food products also tend to be more nutritious when in season as compared to products that have been shipped long distances.

## Ask Questions

- Was this made or grown in Nova Scotia or Canada?
- Could I get a similar product that was made locally?
- How far was this shipped to get here?

## Take Action

- Look for products that are labelled as made in Nova Scotia or Canada.
- Shop at farmers markets for produce and at grocery stores that support local producers.
- Buy meat from local butchers and bread from local bakeries.
- Find out what produce is in season, and buy directly from local farmers.
- Freeze local in-season produce to have it year round.
- Look for frozen local produce in the off season.
- Cook meals from scratch, using fresh and frozen local ingredients whenever possible.
- Also seek out certified Fair Trade products such as coffee, tea, sugar and spices.
- Seek out local cabinetmakers and furniture makers.
- For special gifts, consider items produced by local artisans.
- Take your time and search for clothing made in Canada.
- Ask your garden centre if transplants have been grown in the province.



**NOVA SCOTIA**  
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# Environmentally Responsible Consumer Guide continued...

## Buy for Life

When you purchase new items, consider the materials used to make them, the pollutants released during manufacturing and the fate of the item when it is discarded. It is important that the materials and energy used to make a product are not wasted. Buying durable and repairable products that can be used for years or perhaps a lifetime is an important principle to follow.

One-time-use items, non-repairable products and low quality items have become commonplace and are quickly replacing reusable and durable products in the marketplace. Buying low quality and disposable items create recurring costs that collectively add up to a lot of money over time and costs our environment also.

If products are in good working order but are of no use to you anymore, consider selling or giving away items rather than putting them into the garbage.

## Ask Questions

- How long will this item last?
- Can this be repaired?
- Is this a one-time-use or disposable item? Can I purchase a reusable product for the same purpose?

## Take action:

- Invest in high quality items. Look for testimonials from people who have bought similar things to find which will last the longest and work the best. Check on-line consumer reports.
- Buy reusable items, not disposable alternatives. For example: buy rechargeable batteries instead of batteries that are discarded when charge is depleted, buy washable mops and microfibre wipes instead of disposable cleaning tools, for parties, use reusable dishes rather than buy paper/polystyrene dishes.
- Bring your lunch with you to work or school, and use reusable plastic containers rather than sandwich bags.
- Choose products that are made of sustainable materials and are produced in an environmentally responsible manner. Look for the Forest Stewardship Council logo on wood and paper products. Look for EcoLogo and Green Seal logos on cleaning products, paints, and other products. You will also find other environmental logos on products.



# Environmentally Responsible Consumer Guide continued...

## Buy Recycled (Buy Used)

Nova Scotians have diverted more than 50% of their waste away from disposal sites and into recycling and composting streams. These recyclable materials are used to manufacture new products and packaging instead of using virgin materials. To create a demand for recyclable materials, consumers should purchase products that are made from post-consumer recycled content. Buying things that can be refurbished or recycled at the end of their lives can save large amounts of energy and reduce environmental impact. For example, it takes 95% less energy to recycle an aluminium pop can than to make a new one from virgin ore.<sup>2</sup> Reusing materials and buying used products is even more effective than purchasing goods with recycled content. Buying used goods reduces the need for new items to be made, saving energy and materials.

### Ask Questions:

- Is the product made from recycled materials?
- Can I purchase a used item instead of purchasing a brand new item?

### Take Action:



- Buy products that are made from recycled materials. Check labels for the mobius loop symbol and a statement that the product or packaging is made from recycled material. A number percentage inside or beside the mobius loop symbol indicates the percentage (by weight) of recycled content in the product or packaging. Look for garbage bags, toilet paper, paper towels, packaging, and office paper with recycled content.



- Buy products that are recyclable and have packaging that is recyclable. Look for the mobius loop symbol but make sure that the material is recyclable in your community by contacting your municipal office or looking up "recycling" in the *Yellow Pages*.
- Consider buying used products through second-hand retail stores, yard sales and internet buying sites (such as Kijiji at [www.kijiji.ca](http://www.kijiji.ca)). Second hand items are usually in good condition and cost far less than new items. Seek out used clothing, refurbished vintage clothing, children's toys, furniture, and tools.
- Buy refurbished items such as appliances, car parts, laptops, and furniture. Refurbished products cost less, don't waste materials in their production and work just as well as new items.
- Refinishing, re-facing, and re-coating hard-surface furniture are ways to re-new used furniture.

# Environmentally Responsible Consumer Guide continued...

## Buy Product, not packaging

Buy products that have no or minimal packaging. Approximately 30% of waste produced by Nova Scotians is packaging. Packaging is often necessary to preserve and protect the product during shipping. On the other hand, the amount of material used for packaging can far exceed what is needed. As well, the type of material used as packaging can have negative environmental impacts. There are ways you can reduce the environmental impact of packaging on the goods you purchase.

## Ask Questions:

- Is there an option that has no packaging or minimal packaging?
- Can the packaging on this product be reused or recycled / composted in your community?

## Take Action:

- Use a reusable grocery bag rather than taking plastic ones from the store.
- Buy products that are bulk packaged such as family sized packs of food products.
- Bring your own reusable mug or ask for a ceramic mug when purchasing drinks at coffee shops.
- By purchasing concentrated liquids, you will reduce packaging material and reduce the environmental cost of transporting water.
- Avoid items that are individually wrapped in single serving sizes.
- Avoid styrofoam packaging. Look for take-out shops that will accept your reusable container or provide reusable, compostable (such as boxboard) or recyclable containers.

By being a cautious consumer and choosing environmentally preferable products, you can help protect yourself, your family, and the environment.



# Environmentally Responsible Consumer Guide continued...

## Websites of Interest

Booklet for youth on the topic of sustainable consumption.

**[www.c2p2online.com/documents/C2P2\\_web\\_reader.pdf](http://www.c2p2online.com/documents/C2P2_web_reader.pdf)**

EcoLogo Program (Canada's national environmental certification program):

**[www.ecologo.org](http://www.ecologo.org)**

Forest Stewardship Council certifies the responsible management of world's forests:

**[www.fsc.org](http://www.fsc.org)**

Nova Scotia food products:

- Food for Thought: A Buyer's Guide to Local and Seasonal Nova Scotia Agri-Food Products

**[www.gov.ns.ca/agri/marketing/contact/agriculture/foodft/index.shtml](http://www.gov.ns.ca/agri/marketing/contact/agriculture/foodft/index.shtml)**

- Select Nova Scotia

**[www.selectnovascotia.ca](http://www.selectnovascotia.ca)**

- Taste of Nova Scotia

**[www.tasteofnovascotia.com](http://www.tasteofnovascotia.com)**

Global guide to 300 environmental logos:

**[www.ecolabelling.org](http://www.ecolabelling.org)**

National Geographic Green Guide:

**<http://www.thegreenguide.com/products/>**

Why using concentrated products is important:

**[www.concentrateonthefuture.ca](http://www.concentrateonthefuture.ca)**

Energy efficient products such as appliances, electronics and heating/cooling equipment:

**[www.energystar.gov](http://www.energystar.gov)**