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EXTENSION

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## Enviroshopping for Teens<sup>1</sup>

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Every day we make choices that impact our environment. This fact sheet will help you make environmentally friendly choices whenever you make food purchases.

### What's The Problem?

The amount of municipal solid waste (MSW) collected each year in Florida is growing rapidly. We generate about 25 million tons of MSW each year. What happens to all this trash? It is either land-filled, combusted, composted, or recycled.

The highest percentage of MSW ends up in landfills where it remains for hundreds and maybe thousands of years. There is limited space available for new landfills, and few communities want to have landfills in their backyards. So where to put the trash?

Combusting and composting are alternatives to landfills. If we learn to compost, we could reduce waste going to landfills and have fertilizer to use in our yards.

### Why Do We Need Packaging?

About 30 percent of household waste is packaging. Packaging is needed to:

- ◆ protect food from light, heat, oxygen, natural contamination, and tampering.
- ◆ preserve food and prevent food waste.
- ◆ protect consumer goods from being crushed, soiled, or shoplifted.
- ◆ protect children from ingesting drugs and hazardous chemicals.
- ◆ inform consumers of proper use, storage, features, and warranty.
- ◆ allow for easier warehousing, transportation, and distribution.

Although some packaging is necessary, many products have excess packaging to extend shelf life or increase convenience.

### What Can We Do?

The Florida Cooperative Extension Service has developed a program to help consumers

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address the solid waste problem. The program “Enviroshopping” promotes Five Rs:

### **Reduce: Buy Less**

Reducing the amount of waste that is generated by buying less is the most important of the 5 Rs of Enviroshopping. We call this “precycling” since we do it before we purchase items. To precycle, we need to think before we buy.

❖ Choose products that are:

- ☺ durable                      ☺ easy to repair
- ☺ energy efficient        ☺ functional
- ☺ non-polluting

❖ Look for products with good warranties; they will probably last longer.

So, instead of buying juice in disposable boxes, have a reusable beverage holder that can be filled from a large container. You can probably think of many other disposable products that you can do without.

### **Reuse**

Many packages that we buy are sturdy and attractive. We can use them for other purposes after they are empty. When we reuse packages we save money and landfill space, conserve resources, and reduce pollution.

Here are some examples:

- ❖ Steel can                      → Pencil holder
- ❖ Soda bottle                  → Bird feeder
- ❖ Small jar                      → Store nails
- ❖ Plastic containers        → Food storage

Use your imagination to think of other ways to reuse packages. Every time you reuse a package, you help preserve our natural resources. It’s a great way to be creative too!

### **Recycle**

Recycling allows us to utilize packaging that would otherwise end up in a landfill. We put clean containers into recycle bins and materials are collected. The materials are processed and converted into other products that can be purchased.

Consumers need to be involved in both steps of recycling: providing raw materials and buying the recycled material after it is made into something else. Look for the recycled symbol on packages that you buy.

### **Reject**

As an Enviroshopper you want to buy materials and products that have the least impact on the environment. Reject those that cannot be reduced, reused, or recycled.

### **Respond**

Let companies know when you want them to change the way they package certain products. Discuss your concerns with store managers, and encourage them to consider source reduction and recyclability in the products that they offer for sale. Speak to local government officials about starting or expanding a recycling program.

### **Why Be an Enviroshopper?**

The choices you make today will have an impact on the environment, one way or another. Why not choose to make a difference in a positive direction by becoming an Enviroshopper?

Practice the 5 Rs and teach your friends how to help reduce the solid waste problem in your community, our country, and the world.