

Enviroshopping for Teens¹

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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 purchases and encourage you to take a second look at items before throwing them away.



Figure 1.
Credits: Thinkstock

What's the Problem?

The amount of municipal solid waste (MSW) collected in Florida reached a peak of 36.5 million tons in 2005 and was down to 28.8 million tons in 2009. Although it's a step in the right direction, a tremendous amount of trash is still put into a landfill, combusted, composted, or recycled. About 20% of household waste is packaging.

In Florida, the highest percentage of MSW (15.8 million tons, or 55%, in 2009) ends up in a landfill, where some of

Florida Municipal Solid Waste Management (2009)

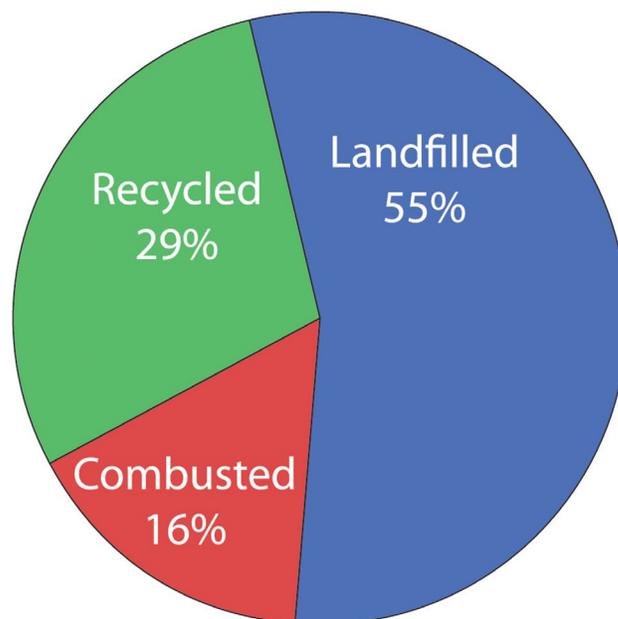


Figure 2.
Credits: Florida Department of Environmental Protection, 2009
the material remains for hundreds and maybe thousands of years. There is limited space available for new landfills, and few communities want to have landfills in their backyards. So where can we put our trash?

Combusting and composting are two alternatives to landfills. Combusting (incinerating) solid waste can greatly reduce the volume of waste in our communities, and it also can generate energy. In 2009, only about 4.5 million tons

1. This document is FCS8756, one of a series of the Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. Original publication date August 2002. Latest revision September 2012. Visit the EDIS website at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.
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of MSW were combusted in Florida. Composting is an alternative that individuals and families can choose. When we learn to compost, we reduce waste going to landfills and have fertilizer to use in our yards and gardens. About 8.5 million tons of MSW were composted in 2009 in Florida.

What Can We Do?

The Florida Cooperative Extension Service has developed a program to help consumers address the solid waste problem. The “Enviroshopping” program promotes the “Five Rs”: reduce, reuse, recycle, reject, and respond.

Reduce

Reducing the amount of waste that is generated by buying less is the most important of the Five Rs of Enviroshopping. We call this “precycling” since we do it before we purchase items. To precycle, we need to think about the products themselves as well as their packaging *before* we buy.

Choose products wisely. Look at the items you are thinking about buying and choose products that are:

- durable,
- easy to repair,
- energy efficient,
- functional, and
- nonpolluting.

For example, instead of buying water in disposable bottles, buy a reusable beverage holder that can be filled from the tap or a filtered dispenser. You can probably think of many other disposable packages that you can do without. Also, look for products with good warranties; they probably will last longer.

Select products with limited or no packaging. Compare the packaging of different brands of the same product and select those that have the least amount of packaging or even none at all. Items packed in multiple containers may look nice, but they create a lot of waste. Plan ahead and bring reusable bags to the store to avoid bringing home plastic or paper bags. Use reusable bags for fruits and vegetables to avoid prepackaged types that create waste. By using reusable shopping bags, you also are helping to spread the message of environmental sustainability!



Figure 3.
Credits: iStockphoto

Reuse Packages

Many packages that we buy are sturdy and attractive. We can use them for other purposes after they are empty. Reusing packages saves money and landfill space, conserves resources, and reduces pollution. Following are some examples:

Steel can = Pencil holder

Soda bottle = Bird feeder

Small jar = Container to store nails

Plastic containers = Food storage (**not for microwave use!**)

Use your imagination to think of other ways to reuse packages. Every time you reuse a package rather than purchasing another item, you help preserve our natural resources. It's a great way to be creative, too! You can teach young children to decorate containers to use as gifts, which saves money and lets them help save our earth!

Clothing

There are several ways in which you can reuse clothes. Clothing swaps with friends can be a fun way to get new (for you) clothes to wear and also to share your clothes with friends. Two ways to reuse your clothes and make some money are to have a yard sale or to put your clothes

in a consignment shop. In a consignment shop, you either get cash or credit for other clothes in the shop when your clothes sell; these stores generally only take clothes that are in excellent condition. Donating clothes to a local charity when they no longer fit is a great way to reuse them by giving to those who can't afford to buy new clothes.

Recycle

Recycling allows us to utilize packaging that would otherwise end up in a landfill. We put clean containers into recycle bins. Bins are available from many waste disposal companies and are often available in schools and other public places. The materials are collected, 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.



Figure 4.
Credits: iStockphoto

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. Look for products that do not have excessive, nonfunctional packaging.

Respond

Let companies know when you want them to change the way they package certain products. Discuss your concerns with store managers, or write to manufacturers 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 Five Rs and teach your friends how to help reduce the solid waste problem in your community, our country, and the world.

References

Florida Department of Environmental Protection. (2009). *Florida Municipal Solid Waste Collected (2009)*. Retrieved November 28, 2011, from http://www.dep.state.fl.us/waste/quick_topics/publications/shw/recycling/2009AnnualReport/MSW-Composition_2009.pdf

Additional Resources

Hammer, M., & Papadi, J. (2012). *Enviroshopping: Buy smarter*. <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/he790>