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MDEQ Promotes a Green Holiday Season

(JACKSON, Miss.) -- MDEQ encourages Mississippians to remember the environment this holiday season through waste reduction, reuse, and recycling practices to "green up" the holiday season. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the amount of household trash increases by 25 percent – or 25 million tons nationally– between Thanksgiving and the New Year. Trimming the holiday waste stream doesn't require much effort.

MDEQ suggests the following green practices:

Decorating Ideas

- Consider having a potted Christmas tree that can be replanted in the wild, in your yard or kept and re-used the next year.
- Recycle your Christmas tree if the service is offered in your community or consider using an artificial tree that can be used year after year.
- Use trimmed branches from your Christmas tree for wreaths or hearth or table decorations rather than discarding them immediately.
- Decorate your home, tree, and centerpiece with holly, cedar, berries, cranberries, popcorn, fruits and nuts - some which can be consumed and all of which can be composted.

Gift Shopping and Wrapping

- When you do your holiday shopping, bring your own re-usable canvas tote bags and avoid using plastic bags, particularly for just one item.
- Consider re-using wrapping or other reusable paper when wrapping Christmas gifts. If every American family wrapped just three presents in re-used materials, that would save enough paper to cover 45,000 football fields.
- Have children make their own wrapping paper by designing and coloring brown paper grocery bags, using old homework pages, old Christmas Cards, or hand drawn pictures to wrap gifts in. Grandparents will appreciate the special touch of a grandchild to any gift.
- Consider using commonly discarded paper items for wrapping gifts—Sunday comics, old posters, maps, discarded sheet music, and wallpaper scraps for wrapping paper.
- Use and re-use gift bags instead of wrapping paper.
- Avoid using metallic gift wrapping paper because this paper is generally not recyclable.
- Choose products that use less packaging material.
- Look for products with the U.S. EPA's Energy Star logo. These items have been evaluated and rated for their energy efficiency.

Gift Ideas

- Home-baked cookies, bread, or jams or a plant or tree that can be planted in the recipient's yard.
- Consider gifts that keep on giving such as a compost bin, battery charger, rechargeable batteries, compact fluorescent light bulbs, a perpetual calendar, or an erasable message board.
- Give two gifts in one by using baskets, scarves, or pillowcases to wrap gifts.
- Give gifts that don't create wastes such as passes to the zoo or an amusement park, music lessons, tennis, golf, or other sports lessons, memberships to an organization, tickets to a concert or movie, dinner at a restaurant, a subscription to an online magazine or newspaper, an IOU to help rake leaves or repair a leaky faucet.
- Give gifts that get "used up" such as candles, soap, or seeds for the garden.
- Give durable toys for gifts that are made from wood or metal so that they can be passed down, even becoming collectible items.
- If purchasing electronic items such as a computer, television, cell phone or gaming station, find a retailer that will take back the outdated or obsolete item being replaced and that will recycle the obsolete item.
- If you cannot find retailers with take back programs, recycle the obsolete electronic devices through local community recycling programs or donate computers or televisions that have useful life to community groups, local schools, or nonprofit organizations. (Please don't burden organizations with extremely old or non-functioning electronic items.)

After The Holidays

- Clean out the closets and donate used toys and clothing to charitable organizations.
- Recycle your Christmas tree if the service is offered in your community. Christmas trees can be used for fish spawning habitats, for mulch for public landscaping projects and homeowner use, for boiler fuel, and for lake, river, and beach front stabilization.
- Save wrapping paper, bows, and ribbons to use for the next holiday season. If you can't re-use these items, try to recycle as much of the wrapping paper, gift boxes, bags, and gift packaging materials as

possible.

- Make a New Year's resolution to start a recycling program at home or at work. Call your city or county to find out more information about recycling opportunities.
- Remove yourself from mailing lists for catalogs and other similar mail order circulars. Most of these catalogs and retail items can be found and ordered from retailers' websites.

For more information on waste reduction, re-use and recycling programs or ideas, contact your local solid waste department, Keep Mississippi Beautiful affiliate, County Extension Service agents or the MDEQ. Simple, common sense steps can provide an inexpensive and enduring gift to our natural resources as well as leave more "green" in your checkbook.

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