

Back to School - Go Green!

Ramsey County Commissioner Victoria Reinhardt
Contact at 651-266-8363 or Victoria.Reinhardt@co.ramsey.mn.us

The summer is winding down and the hot and humid days of August remind us that it is almost time for school. Soon students will be back at school, seeing friends and learning new things. But before then, there is back to school shopping!

With all the planning to find just the right items and the fun of purchasing them before the school bell rings us back from summer break, it is the perfect time to plan and purchase with the environment in mind. Americans spend billions of dollars on back to school related items, changing our habits in this area can have profound impacts on our environment and economy. Think Green!

Start with the obvious. Look for school supplies with recycled content. Read the label, look for the amount of recycled content in everything from notebooks and pencils to printer ink cartridges and even backpacks. Recycled paper, in amounts up to 100% post consumer waste, are available and priced competitively. Look also for vegetable based dyes used in notebooks. Check the internet for “rescued paper notebooks” that bind together the white backsides of previously used paper into an eco-friendly use.

Pens and pencils is another area where we can have an impact on the environment. Refillable pens create less waste and can even be made from cornstarch and recycled paper instead of petroleum products. Also, look for tree free pencils. Pencils can be made out of everything from recycled newspaper to old blue jeans.

Try to avoid backpacks that contain nylon or new plastics, especially PVC (vinyl). Instead look for recycled content or natural materials such as hemp or recycled rubber. I know there are many factors that make a backpack “cool”, try to add “green” to that list.

Packing a lunch box is a way to assure both a healthy body and healthy environment. Packing a lunch box with reusable containers helps assure less packaging is wasted and that your child has access to their favorite healthy snacks at school. Lunch boxes or reusable bags with choices of colors and patterns are a way to express individual style too. Up the ante with a cloth napkin and reusable utensils, which can be brought home in the same fun container.

When looking for clothes or to furnish the dorm room, look for alternatives to new stuff. Buying used products saves money, reduces waste and helps the environment. Trendy fashions, practical winter coats, and furniture for dorm rooms can be found by checking the yellow pages listings under "Second Hand Stores" and "Consignment Stores." There is also a guide to shopping second hand in Ramsey County available in the Public Health section of our website www.co.ramsey.mn.us/ph.

Back to school shopping is a family bonding experience and a teachable moment. Let the first lesson this year be how to save money and the environment by paying attention to what we buy.

Source: Victoria A. Reinhardt, Ramsey County Commissioner, District 7
Contact: Darren Tobolt, 651-266-8368

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