

# Back to the basics

Now that geo-thermal technology, green roofs and solar panels are becoming more commonplace, it can be easy to forget about the basics: reduce, reuse and recycle. Hennepin County offers a plethora of information about how to incorporate these three concepts in your day-to-day life. For more information, go to [www.hennepin.us](http://www.hennepin.us). — *Compiled by Brett Stursa*

## Reuse

We all have items we no longer want. Before you throw the item out, consider these simple steps to keep that item out of the garbage can.

### Repair

Try to repair an item before throwing it away. Repairs can be less expensive than replacement and can improve the performance, safety and/or efficiency of a product. Get items repaired and put back to use quickly. If an item sits around unused because it needs repair, it's likely to become garbage next week or next year.

### Rent

Renting is a great choice if you only need to use something once in a while. Consider renting tools for home projects, lawn and garden equipment, party supplies, and camping and recreational gear. Renting can allow you to test a product before you buy it to determine whether you want to make the long-term commitment. Renting goods also saves storage space and maintenance costs.

### Donate

Donating useful goods you no longer need will help chari-

ties raise funds for their causes. Other donation services provide items directly to those in need.

### Shop smart

By paying attention to the following concepts when you're shopping, you can purchase things that will last longer and are more likely to be useful to others after you're done with them. Buy once, buy well. Well-designed and constructed products will last longer and usually save you money even if they cost more initially. Do some research before you buy and avoid impulse purchases. Share your stuff. Many items are needed only for special projects or activities. Sharing can save you money and build relationships within your community. Offer to lend your neighbor your power rake for an afternoon in exchange for using his carpet cleaner.

### Take care of your stuff

Keep up on maintenance. Proper maintenance keeps an item useful longer and will



increase resale or donation value. Maintenance also helps identify wear and tear or defects that can compromise the safety of a product. Stay organized. Organizing what you have will reduce the risk of damage or breakage and helps you find what you need when you need it. Not only will this reduce searching for items, you'll be less likely to purchase duplicate items.

### Sell your stuff

Many stores around the Twin Cities will buy used goods. Some stores will give you credit or will trade for your item.

### Hold a garage sale

A garage sale can be an

easy way to get rid of your used goods and earn some money. Most garage sales are held during the spring and summer, but some sales, especially estate sales, are held year round. Here are some

options to keep in mind when planning a garage sale. Host your own garage sale. Various online resources have tons of ideas and tips on holding a garage sale. Organize a neighborhood garage sale. Contact your neighborhood group or your city recycling coordinator to see if your neighborhood or city already sponsors a garage sale day. Think about hosting the garage sale the day before a neighborhood or city sponsored clean up day to maximize the opportunity for reuse before unwanted items become trash.

### Consign your goods

Don't feel like holding a garage sale or finding someone to buy your stuff? Consignment shops and stores that sell through online auction houses will sell your goods for you. The

stores will take a commission, but they allow you to simply drop off your items and still earn money from them.

### Exchange

Organize a community exchange at the local school, community center or a place of worship.

### Auctions

Look in the Yellow Pages under auctioneers and auction houses for local businesses. Larger auction houses even offer Internet bidding and Internet auctions. Online auction sites are some of the most active sites on the Internet. For an excellent primer on Internet auctions, see the Federal Trade Commission information on Internet auctions.

### Visit a library

Consider checking out a book or CD instead of buying your own copy. The Hennepin County Library System has 41 libraries with a circulation of more than 5 million books, CDs and DVDs in 40

languages. The library system also has 1,600 public computers.

### Buy used

You'll save money buying from a used goods store or consignment shop. Buying used helps the environment by keeping usable goods out of the trash and by reducing the resources required to manufacture and distribute new products.

### Use online exchange services

There are several Internet-based listing services for residents who want to sell, give away or purchase reusable goods for their home, garage or garden.

### Use the Hennepin County Free Product Centers

Usable products dropped off for disposal at the county drop-off facilities may be selected for reuse and placed in the Free Product Center. Residents 18 years and older may pick up free, usable products such as automotive products, adhesives and glues, aerosols, cleaners, latex paint, oil based paint and stains.



## Reduce

More than 1 million tons of trash are created in Hennepin County every year. Here are some steps you can take to reduce waste:

### Stop receiving unwanted mail

Every year each person gets an estimated 39 pounds worth of third class mail. You can reduce the amount of unwanted mail you receive by removing your name from junk mail lists and learning how to keep your name off mailing lists. You can try contacting companies directly or check out the Web site listed for specific types of mailers.

**Credit cards:**  
[www.optoutprescreen.com](http://www.optoutprescreen.com)

**Mail list brokers and marketing associations:**  
[www.dmchoice.org](http://www.dmchoice.org)

**National mailers:**  
Red Plum (Mailbox Values), ShopWiSe  
[www.advo.com/consumersupport.html](http://www.advo.com/consumersupport.html)  
Val-Pak Direct Marketing Systems (Cox Target Media)  
[www.coxtarget.com/contact.html](http://www.coxtarget.com/contact.html)  
Money Mailer, LLC  
[http://moneymailer.com/contact.html](http://http://moneymailer.com/contact.html)

**Catalogs:** Contact the individual catalog mailer or go to [www.catalogchoice.org](http://www.catalogchoice.org)

### Reduce packaging waste

You probably don't go to a store saying, "I think I'll buy some trash today." But depending on which products you choose, that's partially what you are doing. About 30 percent of trash is packaging, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Look for items that have less packaging, buy in bulk, avoid individually wrapped items, buy unpackaged fruits and vegetables, purchase items such as dish soap and laundry detergents

in concentrate.

### Green your celebrations

From Thanksgiving to New Years, household waste increases 25 percent. The additional food waste, packaging, wrapping paper and decorations adds up to 1 million tons of garbage a week nationwide. Try sending invitation over e-mail, use reusable tableware, don't turn on all your house lights during a party, turn down your heat before your guests arrive or aid your guests in setting up a car-pool.

### Carry reusable mugs, bottles and bags

Carry reusable bags with you when you go shopping and bring reusable mugs or bottles to avoid single-serving beverage containers.



## Recycle

Confused about what can and can't be recycled? Hennepin County lists these materials as items that are collected for curbside recycling:

### Glass

- Food and beverage containers

### Metal

- Food and beverage cans

### Plastic

- Plastic bottles with a neck



### Paper

- Mail, office and school papers
- Newspaper and inserts
- Cardboard boxes
- Magazines and catalogs
- Phone books

- Shredded paper in closed paper bags
- Cereal boxes, cracker boxes, pasta

- Boxes: cake mix boxes, shoe boxes, gift boxes, electronics boxes, boxes from toothpaste, medications and other toiletries

