

December Newsletter: Holiday Edition



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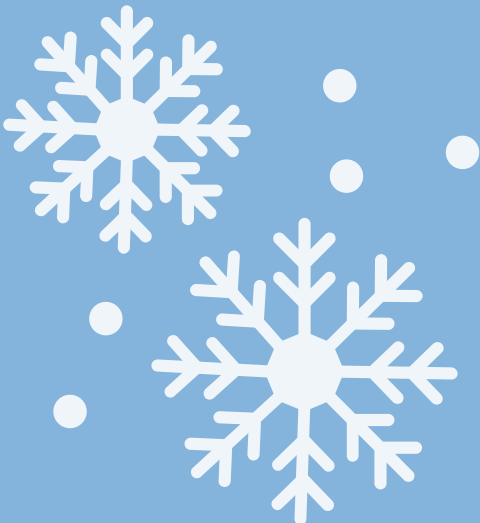
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DECEMBER ACTION OF THE MONTH: WEATHERIZE YOUR HOME BY SAMRIDDHI P.



With seasons shifting to colder temperatures, SLIA has chosen “weatherize your home” as the December Action of the Month to help you protect your home from outside elements and prepare for this winter.

Weatherization modifies buildings in order to optimize energy efficiency. “It includes insulation in key areas, like the attic, floors, sidewalls; sealing the perimeter of the home; and addressing air infiltration with advanced diagnostics like blower-door technology to guide the process.” -

<https://nascsp.org/top-five-reasons-you-should-care-about-weatherization/>

- ⇒ Take a look at this article to find out more about the importance and benefits of weatherizing your home! Weatherizing your home can help improve the health and safety of you and your family members. If you live with elderly people or have any senior family or friends, it is essential that they weatherize their homes as many studies have proven that it significantly helps improve resident health and reduce energy and health costs. Another benefit of weatherization is that it helps you to save money on energy costs while making your home environmentally friendly. It helps homeowners save on utility bills and is a great investment, especially during cold seasons.

One effective way to weatherize your home is by sealing air leaks. You can save 5-15% of your home heating and cooling by simply plugging holes. This is both extremely convenient and inexpensive. Air leaks are often one of the largest sources of heat loss, typically occurring when outside air enters and conditioned air leaves your house through cracks and openings. When seasons change, specifically when it gets warmer or colder, air leaks can result in poor air quality inside homes, which can highly affect the occupant's health. Moreover, sealing air leaks improves your home’s comfort, durability, and energy efficiency, which creates a healthier indoor environment for residents. Air leaks can waste money and are substandard, so it’s important to take action as soon as possible.





Sealing leaks can save up to 15% on monthly heating and cooling bills and can be completed with \$20-50 in caulking and weatherstripping supplies. This is one of many examples that is particularly effective because it is budget-friendly while protecting your home from air leaks.

If you're not sure how to seal air leaks, be sure to ask someone you know (friend, family, or neighbor), or hire an energy assessor or any other weatherization expert to help you out.

- 1) To start off, begin by identifying air leaks in your home. Do this by investigating common leak sites, cracks, gaps, and openings where cold air may be coming through.
- 2) Install weatherstripping and door sweeps for drafty windows and doors—Weatherstripping is used to seal components that move to open and close such as doors and windows. If you already have weatherstripping installed in your home, make sure to check it from time to time for replacement. Check out: [Energy.gov Weatherstripping guide](#) for more information on weatherstripping and a guide for its installation process.

Another thing you can do to weatherize your home is install door sweeps and thresholds underneath your doors. This saves money on both heating and cooling, protects against moisture and dust, and keeps cold air, insects, and other things from getting into your home.

- 3) Caulk and seal air leaks. Caulking is used for cracks and openings between smaller air leaks.
- 4) Block heat from escaping up your chimney. Make sure your fireplace is closed when it is not in use, and if you want to take it a step further, install glass doors you keep closed to let in the warm air. Check out the [link](#) in step 4 for more ideas.

We hope that the information presented in this article has helped you learn more about the importance and benefits of weatherizing your home! You can find more information on starting your weatherization process and take action with us on the [Cleaner Contra Costa Challenge website](#).



The Environmental Waste of the Holiday Season

BY ALISON CHIU

ART BY KARLINA MEYER

During the holiday season, Americans spent \$15.2 billion on holiday gifts in 2019 with 4% of them ending up in the trash. A deceptively small percentage, this amount actually accounts for about \$608 million worth of trashed gifts, with household waste increasing about 25% during the holidays (specifically from Thanksgiving to New's Year). Despite the shocking face-value of these statistics, being more informed on the waste you might be contributing to can make you a lot more conscious of your impact and motivate you to be a sustainable gift giver this year.

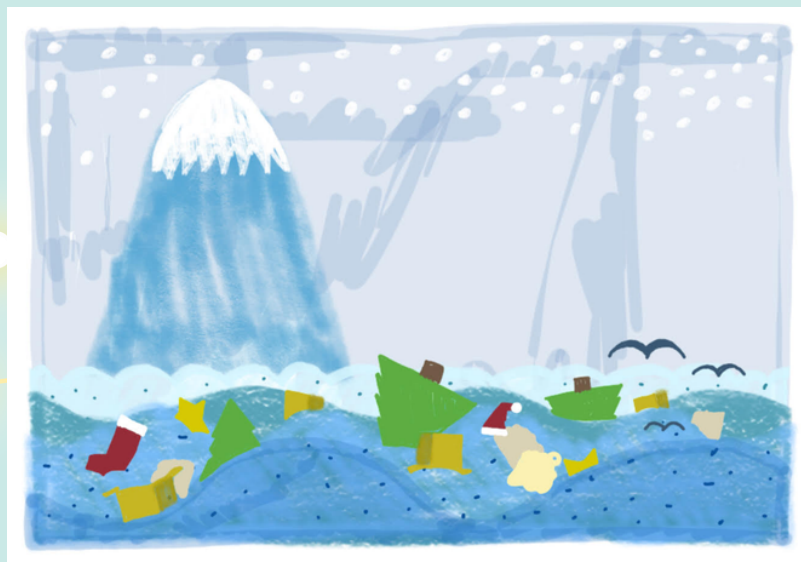
Consumerism has been one of the biggest, most inescapable influences on waste- it has even been claimed to be the driving force behind our holiday season. From beloved, traditional symbols like Santa Claus to the act of gift giving, it is clear that a need for more is a major reason for the increase in excessive materialism during the holiday seasons. So many holiday traditions are rooted in spending that it can become hard to determine where holiday spirit ends and capitalism begins.

Additionally, holidays like Black Friday, Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's day often outright encourage people to spend as part of tradition. If the spending is not on gift giving, it's on decorations or food, which all ultimately turn into textile and plastic waste (if not much more).



Black Friday is a holiday that is notorious for low prices that customers go crazy over. Many families have a big meal on Thanksgiving day with a turkey as the main dish. Christmas traditionally is the holiday for gift-giving to friends and loved ones, and on top of all this, people finish off the year with various types of celebratory decorations. All of this spending contributes to unimaginable amounts of waste, with stores encouraging customers along the way. It has been found that simply due to a store's compelling layout, 62% of consumer's in-store purchases can amount to impulsive decisions, demonstrating only a fraction of the danger that stores can pose during holiday season. The temptation to spend quite a bit simply cannot elude some people.

On average, each person's carbon footprint during the holiday season in the US also increases 1,400 pounds, a dramatic rise from regular levels, revealing just how unsustainable the holiday season is for our environment. However, it is not too late to reduce your waste- it simply starts with being informed about the numerous ways in which consumerism is both an underlying cause and an obvious factor in excessive spending and waste during the holidays.



Are You Biting off More Than You Can Chew?

By: Stacey Ndeke

As the year comes to an end, Thanksgiving, Black Friday, Cyber Monday, and Christmas reign supreme when it comes to holiday consumerism. A typical holiday consumer will add an additional 1,400 pounds to their average carbon footprint, largely due to the mass consumption involved with holiday shopping. Retail shops do a great job of exacerbating our spending habits with colorful, flashy and bold signs persuading us to buy things we don't actually need.

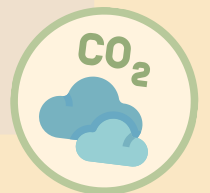


Store layouts are one way we are coaxed into impulsively buying items. By placing the most needed items, such as milk in grocery stores, batteries in electronic stores, and shirts and pants in clothing stores, at the back of the store, customers are forced to walk through a variety of advertisements and be exposed to the “Must Have!” products along the way. In 2020, Black Friday gathered up \$9 billion dollars in sales, with 80% of purchased items being thrown out shortly after- most likely the result of the deliberate arrangements and flamboyant marketing strategies used to lure in consumers and entice them into buying unessential products. So before you make another purchase, stop and ask yourself, “Do I really need this?”

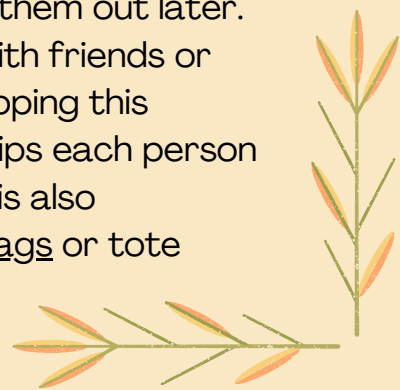
To decrease the probability of not being satisfied with a purchase, you can follow a system called the “Four Gift Christmas.” This includes buying:



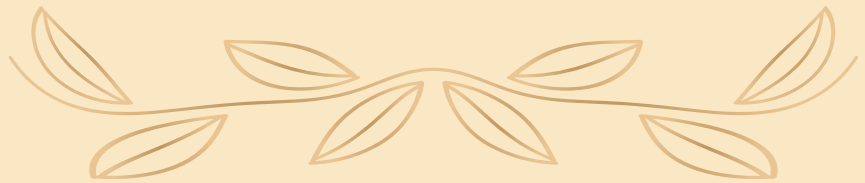
- Something you want
- Something you need
- Something to wear
- Something to read



This system will not only help limit the number of items you buy, but will also increase the usefulness of these items so you are less likely to throw them out later. Another way to reduce your holiday carbon footprint is carpooling with friends or taking another means of transportation other than driving when shopping this holiday. By ridesharing you can reduce the number of unnecessary trips each person would have to make if they had gone by themselves. Shopping locally is also something to keep in mind, and always remember to bring reusable bags or tote bags with you to save money and use less plastic waste.



Consumer culture today is often fueled by the idea of “FOMO” or Fear Of Missing Out. Collectively as a society, we tend to value shopping as a rewarding task and a source of dopamine or “retail therapy.” Consumerism is even worse now that we have all-day access to nearly every market with just a simple touch of our phones. When the holiday season rolls out, we are surrounded by hundreds of ads berating us about these “Can't Miss!” deals and sales, and we end up buying everything we see to satisfy this feeling of potentially missing out. Later down the road, we realize that what we bought has only ever left its box once or twice since its initial purchase and we end up either throwing it away or giving it to a second-hand shop if it can still be saved.



This creates a process called the “Take, Make, Waste System.” Global resources are extracted and used to produce and manufacture a product. The product is then used and commercialized for more people to buy, and eventually the product is disposed of soon after it’s no longer seen as useful or trendy.



Not only is this system detrimental to the environment but it hurts us individuals as well. The alarming rate at which we go through trends leaves us often unsatisfied, bored, and wanting more. The more we shop, the higher the expectations rise, thus further reducing the worth of each item. It desensitizes us to the sentimental value and the significance of gifts, which ultimately leads to the mass accumulation of waste caused by our gluttonous actions. This waste, although seemingly inconsequential in the short term, is creating an increasing burden on our planet- one that can't be held for much longer. So this holiday season, think diligently and responsibly before adding anything extra to your cart because a small change can make a big difference, on the environment and on ourselves.

HOW TO REDUCE WASTE THIS HOLIDAY!



BY: POLLYANN DIZON

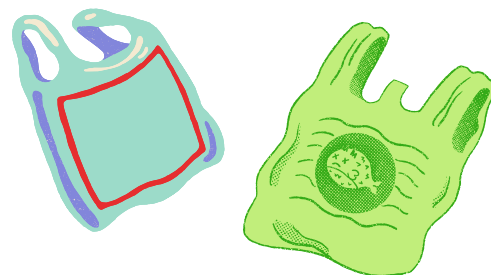
The Christmas spirit is

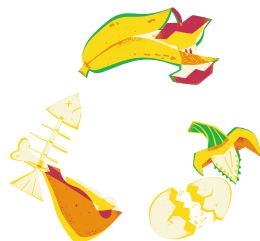
filling the air as the holidays are coming up! However, the amount of waste that is produced by Americans during the holidays is about **25% higher** than any other time in the year, so here are some ways that you can be less wasteful.

To start off, get rid of the wrapping paper! We're used to opening our presents and disregarding the amount of wrapping paper that has been used and later trashed. Think about how much of a waste that is! Not to mention, these **decorative wraps** typically include dyes and non-paper materials like glitter and plastics, which make the recycling process difficult and fill up our landfills even more.

Fortunately, there are ways to work around using wrapping paper while still making the holidays a fun experience! There are plenty of examples of reusable wrapping such as cloth wraps, decorative towels, or even socks, which can be used repeatedly every year. As stated by **Stanford University**, "If every American family wrapped just 2 presents in reused materials, it would save enough paper to cover 45,000 football fields." That is an insane amount of paper that could be saved and shows how powerful an impact like that would be on our environment!

The second way to lessen our waste during the holidays is to use our own shopping bags. At the end of every year after gift shopping, our houses are usually stocked up with plastic bags from several stores. In fact, **Americans use** about 100 billion plastic bags every year that will take about 1,000 years to break down! The amount of plastic that is used worldwide is enough to impact the planet substantially, so it is important to start thinking about switching to reusable bags this holiday season.





A third way to have a less wasteful holiday is changing the type of Christmas lights we use. [LED holiday lights](#) are much more durable, use less energy, and are way safer than our old, traditional (incandescent) lights. LED holiday lights use light-emitting diodes, which use much less heat than the incandescent ones that typically use filaments. This means that less electricity is used since the more heat that something produces, the more electricity that is applied. Also, fewer gas-emissions are produced since less power is being utilized, which is great for our environment! With less heat being produced in LED holiday lights, it's also less of a safety hazard. According to the [National Fire Protection Association](#), about 790 fires start at home annually in the U.S. due to decorations, and 12% involve "electrical distribution and lighting equipment."

With regard to food waste, choose to buy less food this holiday season and compost what you can't eat! Every Christmas, families tend to have large gatherings but usually have food left over. These leftovers mainly sit in the fridge and are forgotten until they spoil. These foods are later trashed and soon rot in our landfills. As they decompose, they release greenhouse gasses like [methane](#) - a harmful gas for our world and homes. Choosing to reduce the amount of food that is bought is a viable solution to cutting down the quantity of waste in our beautiful planet, and deciding to compost what food is left over is extremely helpful as well!

Even though the holiday season is thought to be an exciting and fun time to spend with family, it can still be enjoyed while being less wasteful. Keeping in mind the different paper, plastic, food, and light waste that come with this celebration, you can make an impact on our environment by decreasing the amount of waste you use this upcoming joyful holiday!



* The Gift of the Season *

By: Joshua Odiase



'Tis the season of giving, when carolers come to your door and recite hymns, festivities are around every corner, and joy and happiness are flourishing. The holiday season is the best time of the year to increase sustainability by simply fixing the small, harmful actions that could go over your head.

Holiday food

One thing most people don't pay particular attention to is leftovers. "With the diminishing availability of farmland, climate change, and the threat of declining water resources, livestock needs to meet the growing demand for food and feed by using fewer resources." Preserving leftovers and reusing extra food as sustainable ingredients can mitigate climate change by reducing the competition between humans and animals for nutrition. There are various ways to manage holiday leftovers: using canning jars and zip bags for leftovers, buying local (a great way to lower your carbon footprint), planning out proportions for how much food you or others plan to eat, being aware of expiration dates, and most importantly, eating all the food you make.

Travel

Jingle bells, barnacle boy smells, all the way to your next destination. Not all of us have Mermaid Man and Barnacle Boy's "invisimobile", a car that leaves no carbon footprint, but there are ways to minimize your travel impact on the environment significantly.

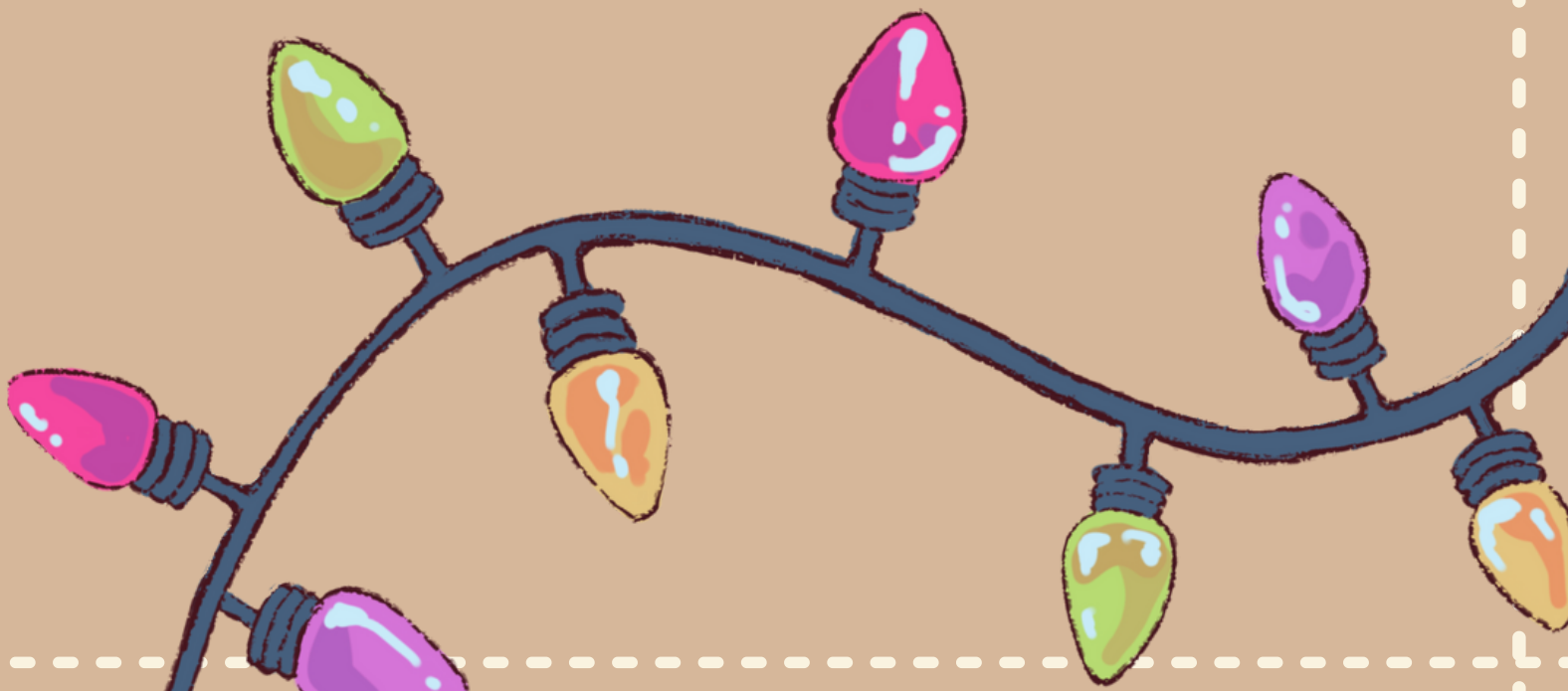


Utilize eco-friendly booking sites like [bookdifferent](#) for your traveling accommodations and needs, which will calculate your carbon footprint per night based on your selected traveling experience. Choose eco-friendly places. Since most forms of transport contribute to your carbon footprint, reduce holiday emissions by choosing a destination close to home. When deciding on your destination, consider your form of transport. Will you travel by train, car, or plane? Try to avoid short flights (under 500 km) if possible, but if a plane is necessary, then pick airlines with higher occupancy rates. These traveling tips can lower your carbon footprint more than you would expect.



Gift Wrapping

Some hate it, some love it, but one thing is certain: it can be substituted. Around 30 million trees are cut down alone to produce the gift wrap we use for presents to loved ones ([UUCG](#)). Even though you may have good intentions by using intricate gift wrap to surprise your certain someone, it is especially hard to recycle because of the dyes and materials used, meaning the vast majority of it is bound for the landfill. Additionally, in just 2017, [the US spent \\$12.7 billion on gift wrap](#) (including toilet paper and tissue paper).



Money that could have been spent on climate efforts was, unfortunately, diverted towards goods that end up in a landfill. What can you do about this? Instead of a messy gift wrap, use this chance to get creative. There are so many items that can be used in place of gift wraps, like newspaper, magazine cutouts, scarfs, craft paper, or even tote bags. Instead of getting pre-printed designs, make your own and give each gift its own unique touch.



Just remember, whether you are spending time with friends and family or sitting by the tree sipping some hot cocoa, keep track of the small stuff. It might not look like a big deal, but once you let things aggregate, they can become major problems in the future. Reeling back on these subtle pollutants such as leftovers and gift wrap can cause a major shift in how our environment progresses from here. And one last thing- have a happy holiday!



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