



Living Green! Ecology 101

By Laura Hampton

Back to packing lunches, monitoring homework, hectic schedules and carpools. Back to reality. Back to school.

As lives get more complicated, we take shortcuts to make daily tasks easier, but sometimes those shortcuts can be detrimental to the environment. Here are a few ideas to make the school days ahead a little more eco-friendly.

Pack Light

The average child's school lunch can produce 67 pounds of waste in one year. Multiply that by the 225,000 students on the First Coast, and we can potentially save 15 million pounds of trash by simply rethinking the way we pack lunches.

Buy chips, cookies, crackers, applesauce, carrots, yogurt, cheese and soup in bulk to avoid single serving packaging, which creates unnecessary waste.

Instead of plastic sandwich bags, plastic water bottles, disposable utensils, paper napkins and paper lunch bags, buy reusable products. Stylish new lunch gear will last the whole school year and make your child's lunch a trendy treat.

Visit ecolunchgear.com for cloth reusable sandwich bags, snack bags and napkins and laptoplunches.com for lunch kits made from recycled content.

E-Cycle

In the digital age of TVs, computers, video games, GPS systems and cell phones, electronics are a large part of our lives as well as a large source of waste in our landfills.

According to a 2009 report by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), an estimated 2.37 million tons of electronic devices were ready for end-of-life management; of that number, only 25 percent were collected for recycling.

Electronic devices are considered hazardous waste, because they contain lead, lithium, cadmium, mercury, beryllium and other substances that can leach from landfills and contaminate soil and water supplies.

Locally, several organizations dispose of electronic devices free of charge. As certified *e-Stewards Recyclers*, Staples Eco Easy and Dell/Goodwill Reconnect programs are two examples of local venues that practice responsible recycling and disposal of e-waste. Visit earth911.com for a complete list of local electronic recycling locations and the items each organization accepts.

Another option is to donate electronic devices to local nonprofit organizations that can make good use of the products.



Computers, Fax Machines and Printers

Despite an increase in education funding in the 2013 Florida state budget, schools are happy to accept donations of electronic devices in order to supply educational departments and to provide the necessary tools to educate our community's youth. Call your local school board to learn about donation opportunities in your area. Most donations are tax deductible and schools can generally make arrangements to pick up items at your home.

Cell Phones

An organization dedicated to making every relationship violence-free, Hubbard House can turn your old cell phone into a life-saving tool. Newer phones are refurbished and provided to domestic violence victims, so they can call 911 if necessary. Older phones are broken down for parts, providing a fundraising opportunity for this nonprofit organization. Cell phone donations can be taken to the Hubbard House Thrift Store at 6629 Beach Blvd. in Jacksonville from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., Monday through Saturday.


Don't Idle

Ensuring young ones get to school and extracurricular activities can seem like a full-time job. Often, parents and grandparents feel like they're forever waiting in their car.

In situations like this, many leave their car running, but according to the Florida EPA, cutting the engine is better for the environment and your car.


A single vehicle dropping off and picking up kids at one school puts 3 pounds of pollution into the air per month. In addition, turning the car off not only saves precious fossil fuels, but also prevents premature wear on your engine's components including cylinders and spark plugs. Because 10 seconds of idling can use more fuel than turning off the engine and restarting it, the Florida EPA recommends turning your car off, if you will be sitting in the same spot for more than 30 seconds.





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