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Color Your Holidays Green

The holiday season has arrived and this is no time to neglect the good environmental habits that we practice year round. In fact, the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) reminds you that an environmentally friendly holiday can be just as festive and without much extra effort.

“With a little creative thinking and some healthy changes of habit, you and your family can go green this holiday season and keep those habits throughout the new year,” said Bill Bider, Director of KDHE’s Bureau of Waste Management.

Below are some tips to help keep you green:

- **Think outside of the box you are about to wrap.** Try using items found around the house to wrap your presents such as newspaper comics, magazines, decorative boxes, fabric, bows and boxes. If you prefer holiday wrapping paper, look for recycled content in wrapping paper. Ultimately, whatever you wrap your gifts in; don’t forget to recycle the paper, boxes and plastic packaging.
- **Go chop down a tree.** Doesn’t sound like green advice, does it? An artificial Christmas tree might seem like the greener option, since trees aren’t being destroyed and they can be reused year after year. But, they are usually made of materials that cannot be recycled. Christmas tree farms will plant another tree to sell a few years down the line, but in the meantime it’ll be turning carbon dioxide into oxygen and providing habitats for animals. At the end of the holidays, recycle your tree into compost or add it to your brush pile for animal refuge.
- Did you know that Americans produce up to 1 million extra tons of garbage each week between Thanksgiving and New Years? **This year, cut back on excess waste while entertaining.** Compost your food waste; avoid relying on disposable paper goods by using your own dishes or asking guest to bring their own unique table setting; and don’t forget to recycle aluminum cans and glass bottles.
- **Save energy and money this holiday season by switching out your incandescent lights with new LEDs (light emitting diodes).** The good news is LEDs use a fraction of the energy of conventional light bulbs and they last for many years. If you do decorate with lights, don’t forget to use a timer so the lights are only on when there is an audience.
- **Gifts are a part of the holidays, but there are some ways to give greener.** Consider asking those you exchange gifts with to make a charitable donation in your name – there is no packaging involved. Try an experience

present, like tickets to a show, or a night at a hotel. It's something personal that isn't loaded up with all that packaging. Show you care with some thoughtful homemade gifts. Of course, as always, don't forget to take your reusable bags with you when you go Christmas shopping.

- **When practicing the out with the old, in with the new at the New Year, don't just throw out old toys, clothes, shoes and household items.** All these items can be donated to organizations to support people less fortunate who would be happy to have them.

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As the state's environmental protection and public health agency, KDHE promotes responsible choices to protect the health and environment for all Kansans.

Through education, direct services and the assessment of data and trends, coupled with policy development and enforcement, KDHE will improve health and quality of life. We prevent illness, injuries and foster a safe and sustainable environment for the people of Kansas.