

Time for some green spring cleaning

Green Dilemmas

BY ERIC BARTELS

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January can be a rough month for Pacific Northwest residents — lots of gray days with much rain — but it also can be a time of rebirth.

With the holidays over, now's the time to act on those resolutions to make change, and that means getting at clutter. January is Get Organized Month, in case you didn't know.

Simplify your life and create some space by giving your old stuff the heave ho. Here are some fruitful ways to do it from a sustainability standpoint.



L.E. BASKOW / PAMPLIN MEDIA GROUP PHOTO

Clothing is easy to recycle and gets tremendous mileage in reuse. Goodwill (above) and the Salvation Army offer countless options for donations.

Paper

When it comes to clutter, “the number one issue, bar none, is paper,” says Vicki Norris, a Sherwood organizational expert and author.

For most of us, a quick culling will produce reams of useless paper that can simply go to the curb. But what about sensitive stuff like credit card bills, receipts and old love letters?

You can buy a paper shredder for home use starting at around \$25 (although lower-end models aren't always durable).

Some of Norris's clients with an office in their home rent lockable containers for waste paper storage (try Allied Waste Services, 503-226-6161), and then schedule periodic pickups by a document-shredding company. Even large companies like Shred-It (503-443-3830) serve residential customers at home and at their Tualatin location. These companies bale shredded paper and ship it off for recycling.

One sustainable approach to paper collection is to not collect it at all. On Metro's Web site, (www.oregonmetro.gov) readers can stop junk mail by asking direct-mail advertisers to scratch your name from their lists.

Electronics

You finally broke down and got yourself that fancy flatscreen. So what becomes of the old 19-inch that served you well and has the scars to prove it? Or the computer monitor rendered obsolete by improved technology?

Metro runs a local service that is part of Oregon E-Cycles (www.deq.state.or.us/lq/ecycle) in which participating nonprofits like Goodwill and Free Geek (www.freegeek.org) take donations of computers, monitors and televisions, which they restore or recycle.

Mike Wicks of Oregon E-Cycles says the program is not required to accept keyboards, printers and fax machines but may accept them for a small fee.

Paint

This one is easy because you don't have many options. Metro Central Station, off Highway 30 in Northwest Portland, and Metro South Station in Oregon City, are your best bets. If you've never been to these giant emporia of junk, you're missing out. They'll take just about anything off your hands for a modest fee; you simply drive your vehicle onto a giant scale upon arrival and again as you depart, paying for the difference in weight. The best news? They'll take paint and other toxic substances off the hands of homeowners for no charge. What's really cool is that Metro sells recycled paint at its MetroPaint store on Swan Island and at other locations (Call 503-234-3000.) And it's cheap.

Clothing

If you're like a lot of people, your wardrobe may be the place where your hoarding tendencies are most pronounced. Norris says most folks don't wear 80 percent of what's in their closet, which is too bad, because clothing is one of the easiest items to recycle and gets tremendous mileage in reuse.

Since yard-sale season is a ways off, if you've got some well-preserved stuff and want a few bucks out of the deal, you could look at a higher-end resale store like Buffalo Exchange, which has stores on Hawthorne Boulevard (503-234-1302) and West Burnside Street (503-222-3418). They'll pay you about a third of what they think they can get for your items in cash or give you 50 percent in store credit.

Goodwill (503-238-6100), Salvation Army (800-958-7825) and Value Village (www.valuevillage.com) take donated clothes. Norris encourages folks to donate to Dress for Success (www.dressforsuccess.org), Bradley-Angle House (www.bradleyangle.org) and the

faith-based Children's Relief Nursery (503-283-4776), which all provide clothing for women and children transitioning away from abuse, addiction and poverty.

Packing materials

If you've always thought it was a good idea to hang onto cardboard boxes and Styrofoam peanuts, you're not alone. But remember, there will always be more where those came from. Keep a small number of sturdy boxes around, if you must. The rest can be broken down and taken to the curb with your weekly recycling. PLC Recycling (503-285-8777), which will take block Styrofoam off your hands for free, maintains several centers in the Portland area. They also may take clean packing peanuts at no charge. Also, check with shipping companies like UPS (503-222-4888), which reuse the stuff.

Furniture

Norris says this is where a little intentionality can really pay off. Most folks, she says, reach the "point of pain" before they're ready to part with their dustiest possessions. Finally, desperate, they throw everything into a garbage bag and head for the nearest donation center. "We want convenience," Norris says. "I say slow down a little bit and give well."

While organizations like Goodwill put folks to work collecting and repurposing furniture, nonprofits like Community Warehouse (503-235-8786) and church-based Love INC (503-655-4223, clackamasloveinc.org) of Clackamas County are more targeted in their efforts, matching giving with families in need of furnishings.

Best of all, most of these organizations will pick up items at your home for free.

Books, etc.

You can sell used books to Powell's Books (www.powells.com), or you can donate them. One willing taker is Multnomah County's Friends of the Library (www.friends-library.org/booksale), which also accepts videos, CDs, DVDs and other materials.

The nonprofit SCRAP (scrapaction.org), which stands for School and Community Reuse Action Project, accepts all manner of miscellany for use in art projects, ranging from old magazines to scrap wood to bottle caps.

For more information, check the Web sites below. Good luck, and Happy New Year.

www.freecycle.org/group/US/Oregon/Portland

www.donorsresource.org

www.communitywarehouse.org

www.oregonmetro.gov/index.cfm/go/by.web/id=1383

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