

For Immediate Release

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Recycling During the Holiday Season

MERCED, Calif., Mon. December 7, 2009 – The holiday season is a time for a food, presents – and a lot of trash. Much of what’s left over is recyclable. Here are a few tips from the Recycling Education Specialist at Merced County Association of Governments (MCAG).

Gift wrap

All wrapping paper (except metallic), gift tissue paper, gift bags, and flattened boxes can be placed in the curbside recycling can or dropped off for free to either of the two County landfills in Merced and Los Banos. Ribbon can be kept for use in future presents. Otherwise, it should be thrown away to avoid causing damage to recycling machinery.

Packaging Material

Bubble wrap and Styrofoam peanuts can be kept for other packaging occasions, or donated to shipping businesses, such as the UPS Store. If thrown away, place them in the garbage can. Shredded paper, can be used as packaging for fragile gifts. If recycled, place in a paper bag before putting it into the curbside recycling can.

Electronics

The holidays usually bring discount prices on new electronics. The old ones can be taken to the electronic drop off centers, located in front of the Billy Wright Landfill (17173 S. Billy Wright Road, Los Banos) and at the Merced County Household Hazardous Waste (HHW) Facility (6049 N. State Hwy 59, Merced). If electronics still work and are in good shape, donate them to a charity or local school. Do not throw old electronics away, as they contain hazardous materials like lead, cadmium, and mercury, which are harmful to humans and can leach into underground water sources. For a list of places that recycle electronics, please visit www.mercedrecycles.com.

Mobile Phones

Old mobile phones can be turned into AT&T at the Merced Mall, Best Buy, Goodwill, Staples, Wal-Mart, or the Merced County HHW Facility. Mobile phones that still have their charger can be donated to the Area Agency on Aging (209-385-7550). These phones are given to seniors to allow them to make emergency 911 calls.

Batteries

Take all old household batteries to the Merced County HHW Facility. There is no charge for dropping them off. This facility is located in front of the Highway 59 landfill. If the batteries are rechargeable, take them to any Radio Shack. Best Buy and Target accept NiCad batteries (in toys and watches). Lowe's accepts rechargeable ones from items like power tools. There are also mail-back programs where companies provide boxes or pails for battery and portable electronics collection. Once the container is full, just seal and mail it back to the companies for recycling. Some companies that have mail-back programs are The Big Green Box (www.biggreenbox.com) and Battery Solutions (www.batteryrecycling.com).

Compact-fluorescent Light Bulbs

In case any of those energy-efficient lights have finally ran their course, Home Depot accepts dead, unbroken Compact-Fluorescent Lights (CFLs) at the customer returns desk. These lights are energy-efficient and last for years, but contain small amounts of mercury, which makes them hazardous waste. CFLs need to be placed in a plastic bag and then deposited in the orange collection bins by the Home Depot returns desk. Merced County HHW accepts CFLs as well.

Christmas Lights

Replacing your old incandescent strand of Christmas lights with the LED versions, or just trying to recycle strands that no longer work? The following websites have information about mail-in recycling programs: Christmas Light Source (www.christmas-light-source.com) under the "Christmas Lights Recycling Program" page, Environmental Lights, on the bottom of the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) page, at <http://www.environmentallights.com/faqs/>, and Holiday LEDs (www.holidayleds.com) at the bottom under "Free Light Recycling."

Christmas Trees

First, remove the tree stand, nails, metal spikes, lights, ornaments, and as much tinsel as possible. Next, if you have a green waste container (Atwater, Dos Palos, Los Banos, Merced, or County of Merced), cut the tree into 4-foot sections and place them into the container. The tree pieces may not excessively stick out. Flocked trees are not accepted in the green waste cans, and need to be placed in the garbage can.

Gustine residents may place trees in front of their houses (but not in the alleys) on normal garbage pick up days the first two weeks after Christmas. Trees need to be free of lights, ornaments and metal stands; wood stands may remain attached. All trees must be a minimum of six feet from an obstruction, including cars, garbage cans, and miscellaneous debris.

Dos Palos and Livingston residents should contact their city's public works department to ask about their local tree pickup program.

For more information, go to the MCAG recycling website at www.MercedRecycles.com or call the MCAG Recycling Specialist at 209-723-3153 ext. 315.

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About MCAG

MCAG is an association of city and county governments, with members who meet to solve regional problems such as transportation, solid waste, and air quality. More information can be found at www.mcagov.org, or by calling (209) 723-3153, ext. 308.