

Title:

Ho, Ho, Oh Dear

Subtitle:

What a Waste

Body:

As the weather outside gets frightful, it is time to remember that it is winter in the UAE. And with winter comes a the festive season and with the festive season, comes an over abundance of one time use products and energy inefficient party decorations. Normally, I talk about to Waste Management Professional about how to improve their business; however, after the debacle at the recent Climate Change Conference, it is safe to say that each and every one of us will have to make our own personal commitments to change if we are going to make a difference. As the last article which I will write this year, I am conscious of the fact that I too have not done enough to fight climate change so I am recycling my soap box and turning it into my pulpit.

This year, when you are hosting festive parties try to take into consideration the environment. Resist the temptation to splurge on frivolous things which only end up in the waste bin:

- Prepare only as much food as is needed. Use leftovers as lunches or transform them into a new dinner.
- Construct decorations from reused, recycled, or compostable materials.
- Avoid things like holiday poppers and canned snow.
- Serve food on reusable plates and bowls, set out reusable flatware and napkins, and serve drinks in reusable cups and glasses.
- Let everyone know where your recycling and/or compost receptacles are located and be sure they know what goes in each one.

Take the opportunity to clean out your basements and storage closets to clear out clutter. Especially since we have to dig into these storage closets to get to the tree, decorations, and wrapping paper anyway. Once you had identified what you don't need any more, post unwanted pieces on a materials exchange, donate them to charity, or offer them to family and friends.

I recently ran across a post on the EPA website (<http://www.epa.gov/osw/wycd/funfacts/winter.htm>) for reduction of winter waste and after an extensive search, I was unable to find a copyright restriction, so I am sharing this information with you.

- Thousands of paper and plastic shopping bags end up in landfills every year. Reduce the number of bags thrown out by bringing reusable cloth bags for holiday gift shopping. Tell store clerks you don't need a bag for small or oversized purchases.

- Wrap gifts in recycled or reused wrapping paper or funny papers. Also remember to save or recycle used wrapping paper. Give gifts that don't require much packaging, such as concert tickets or gift certificates.
- Send recycled-content greeting cards to reduce the amount of virgin paper used during the holidays. Remember to recycle any paper cards you receive. You can also try sending electronic greeting cards to reduce paper waste.
- About 40 percent of all battery sales occur during the holiday season. Buy rechargeable batteries to accompany your electronic gifts, and consider giving a battery charger as well. Rechargeable batteries reduce the amount of potentially harmful materials thrown away, and can save money in the long run.
- Turn off or unplug holiday lights during the day. Doing so will not only save energy, but will also help your lights last longer.
- After the holidays, look for ways to recycle your tree instead of sending it to a landfill. Check with your community solid waste department and find out if they collect and mulch trees. Your town might be able to use chippings from mulched trees for hiking trails and beachfront erosion barriers.
- To help prevent waste from cutting down and disposing of live trees, you can buy a potted tree and plant it after the holidays.
- Have a create-your-own-decorations party! Invite family and friends to create and use holiday decorations such as ornaments made from old greeting cards or cookie dough, garlands made from strung popcorn or cranberries, wreaths made from artificial greens and flowers, and potpourri made from kitchen spices such as cinnamon and cloves.
- Consider the durability of a product before you buy it as a gift. Cheaper, less durable items often wear out quickly, creating waste and costing you money.
- When buying gifts, check product labels to determine an item's recyclability and whether it is made from recycled materials. Buying recycled encourages manufacturers to make more recycled-content products available.
- Use your own camera instead of a disposable one to reduce waste while capturing holiday memories. Consider buying a digital camera so that you don't have to use film and only print the pictures you want to keep.

Conclusion:

Take into consideration your personal and professional responsibilities. If you own a business or are responsible for the safe and efficient operations of a business, consider implementing systems which monitor your waste production and allow you to gain control over these factors. Remember that it is not only materials that get wasted, but time, energy, fuel, and man power. Take a lead from the telecommunications industry and implement your own "triple play". In these days, it has become more and more important to implement waste management programs which look at all three elements – waste products, resources, and energy.

If you need help on implementing these kinds of systems, please feel free to contact me. Now that I am done, my wife will get the soap box for the kid's cloths.

Season's Greetings, Chris