

Household habits revised for recycling

Making your daily routine environment conscious

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Jennifer Lowen agrees and thinks that the merchants could help by offering some type of incentive — perhaps a discount for customers who bring their own cups. Lowen, a Home Economist from the Environment Resource Centre, conducted the "environmental audit" of Gateway news editor Lisa Hall's apartment.

The coffeemaker was the first item to be criticized.

Since the apartment was a suite in a house, there was a blue recycling box containing newspapers. Magazines, flattened cardboard boxes and milk cartons, a glass containers, metal cans and plastic bags and containers can also go into the "blue boxes", said Lowen, adding that containers should be rinsed first. Composite products are a problem. Glued-on paper stickers should be removed from plastics before recycling.

Recyclables should also be sorted to make things easier at pick-up time, usually the same day as garbage pick up.

Her recommendations were similar to those of Stanszenski — steer away from disposables, paper and plastics and cut down on toxic materials.

The coffeemaker was the first item to be criticized. It used disposable filters and was designed to

keep the brewed coffee hot during the day. Reusable cotton filters are available (although not readily so) and a thermos would keep the coffee hot and save energy.

The roll of paper towels can be replaced by the dishcloths and cloth swabs already in use by the sink. "We didn't have paper towels until about 10 (ten) years ago," said Lowen. "We lived without them, we can live without them again".

The aerosol spray can of Lysol can be replaced by baking soda, which cleans very well. Disinfectants aren't really necessary in Canadian households, since we don't get the plagues of infectious disease here that are found in less hygienically sound countries. Aerosols are also not needed and not wanted — not only do the chlorofluorocarbons used as propellants damage the ozone layer, but the empty containers are non-recyclable and should only be disposed of at "toxic round-ups", upon which they are sent to the Swan Hills special waste management plant.

Liquid Plumber and similar chemicals for clogged pipes are extremely hazardous as well as being highly corrosive to pipes. Baking soda or washing soda mixed with water can be used, as can mechanical alternatives such as plungers or metal snakes.

Carry your own coffee cup to avoid using styrofoam!



Gateway news editor Lisa Hall is told of the ill-effects of using aerosol containers such as Lysol.

Dishwashing liquids for hand washing are usually mild. Phosphate-free, biodegradable liquid can be purchased in refillable containers from the High Level Co-op.

Glass cleaners can be replaced by a simple vinegar-water mix. Household ammonia, while biodegradable, is toxic and can give off hazardous fumes.

Other things to look for are biodegradable wallpaper and furnishings. Paper wallpaper, while not as yet recyclable, is biodegradable. Plastic and paper mixes are not. As for fabrics, only wool, silk, cotton and cellulose-based fibres such as rayon are biodegradable. Polyester is forever.

Plants are the ideal decoration for the environmentally-conscious household — the houseplant in the living room and the African violets in the kitchen help to put oxygen back into the apartment air. The gas stove also received high marks

— less polluting and cheaper energy-wise than an electric stove. Remember: Edmonton's electricity is generated by coal.

In the laundry room, detergents (bought in boxes, not plastic bags) can be replaced by soap powder and either washing soda or borax as a water softener. Bleaches and stain removers (which often contain bleach) can cause clothes to fade and their fibres to corrode. Soap and elbow grease will remove most stains.

Household cleaners, Lowen said, are too strong nowadays. They don't need to be "industrial strength". The mixture of corrosives that is poured down household drains is damaging the sewage system — replacing Edmonton's system would cost over a billion dollars. Some products are environmentally hazardous, some products are hazardous to human health, some are both.

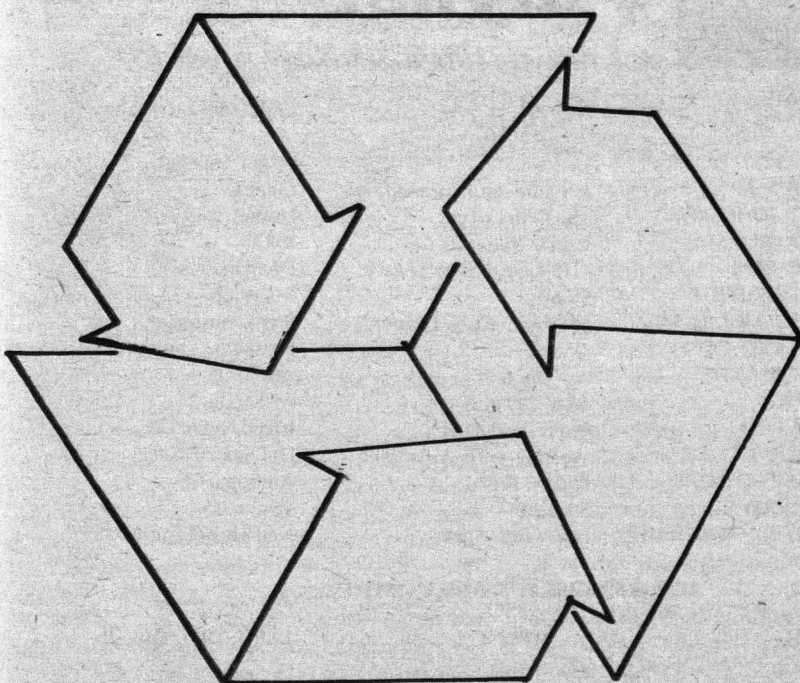
"We've been socialized to use these things without questioning whether we need to and now we are polluting our water," said Lowen. "We need to question the idea of whether we need to use these products. Cut down what you can't cut out."

In the end, individual lifestyles will have to change if progress is to be made.

Start small. Bring your own coffee cup. Put your soft-drink cans in the containers provided in the cafeteria areas. Find a paper recycling bin and use it properly. Before using a disposable product, think "Do I really need this?"

The Gateway is attempting to clean up its act. What about yours?

Further information can be obtained from the Environmental Resource Centre at 433-8711, and at the various displays in HUB, SUB, and CAB during Environment Awareness Week, Oct. 2-6.



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