

Merry Green Christmas



Even though we don't realize it, over the Christmas holidays we impose a larger burden on the environment than usual. With a little effort, we can reduce the environmental impact of the holiday season.

Life is busy before Christmas. Marketers monitor spending fever, while people try to complete their to-do lists and find the best gifts for their loved ones. However, our behavior over these weeks is more environmentally harmful than at any other time during the year. So let's give one more gift this Christmas – a happier planet.

As we do shopping, decorate, or travel this Christmas season, all of this activity generates considerable volumes of energy use and waste. A report by the Stockholm Environmental Institute revealed that consumption of items such as food, travel, lighting, and gifts at Christmas in the UK produces as much as 650 kg of carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions per person. The majority of this balance comes from Christmas shopping, special lightning, and excessive food:

- 26 kg of CO₂ from Christmas food
- 96 kg of CO₂ from Christmas car travel
- 218 kg of CO₂ from extravagant lighting displays
- 310 kg of CO₂ on Christmas shopping

Another statistic from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency shows that the average volume of U.S. household waste increases by 25% over the holidays. This comprises of wasted food, plastic garbage, non-rechargeable batteries, and wrapping paper. Although the Christmas holidays have the meaning of plenty

and abundance, this toll is astonishing if you think of it as a gift to the next generation.

Changing spending behavior over such an important and traditional holiday is difficult without conscious decisions and planned actions. However much can be done by small things focused on reducing energy expenditure and reusing things to minimize waste. Here are some tips to make your holiday season glorious and joyful, but greener as well:

Some tips for tinsel-time

At work

- Before leaving the office, send a note to people to make sure they turn off the power at their desk at the socket, so no plugged in device is using even residual (ghost) power, and power-down any multifunctional devices. Switch off Wi-Fi and lower your heating temperature.
- Consider sending e-cards instead of printed cards.
- The Christmas season is also about giving gifts to business partners. Choose local products instead of something from far away (like wine from New Zealand). Transportation produces pollution and greenhouse gases. You will also support local business. If you want innovative action, give wild honey and support local bees. We've engineered Google Glass, but bees are still more essential to our well-being.
- A Christmas tree is a must in the office – and why not

decorate it with office waste? When doing an internship at an electro-appliance manufacturer, I decorated the Christmas tree with copper wire and coils collected from production waste. The tree was nice and cool (at that time we didn't use the word innovative so much). Such activity can turn the focus towards doing the right thing, and bring about behavioral change in employees more effectively than a new environmental policy.

At home

- Buy your gifts from one place to avoid moving around town – transport means pollution. But traffic jams in towns near shopping centers are making it even worse.
- Consider internet shopping – if there is still time to deliver.
- Use eco bags to avoid plastic waste.

- Your old Christmas lights are very energy inefficient. LED lights look great and are way more efficient.
- Avoid waste. Waste means unwanted gifts, food not eaten, and drives not needed. Consider Christmas gift wish list apps for your smartphone. Optimize cooking and minimize meat. Red meat also has a considerable carbon footprint. Plan a walk around your local Christmas market. There are considerable synergies between healthy and green choices.
- Utilize cardboard boxes from gifts and wrapping paper to make and paint the houses for dolls or pets and garages for toys. Do it as a family exercise to boost team collaboration and the spirit of your family and show what matters most.

May all these tips and information help to make your Christmas greener than ever before!



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