

Sustainability Newsletter Week 51: Aug. 4-8, 2008.

Topic: Greening Back-to-School Shopping



Many back-to-school supplies can be environmental hazards. Backpacks often contain toxic vinyl, paper is bleached, and most supplies are made to be disposable. Use these ideas when out shopping for your child-- elementary school through college:

Bags:

-Avoid backpacks made of nylon or other new plastics, especially PVC (vinyl). Instead, look for bags made from natural materials, such as hemp, or bags made from recycled products.

-Sites like Rawganique (www.rawganique.com) and EcoBodyWear (www.ecobodywear.com) offer good hemp backpack choices.

-There are also solar powered backpacks, available at sites like www.voltaicsystems.com.

Paper:

-Notebooks:

-Look for notebooks made of recycled paper, and preferably post-consumer recycled content paper. Also, encourage kids to use both sides of paper if possible, and only replace notebooks after they have used all the paper.

-OfficeMax, Staples, and Office Depot all offer recycled paper notebooks.

-The Green Office (www.thegreenoffice.com) also offers 100% post-consumer recycled paper products.

-Printer Paper:

-Unless your kids are sending out something fancy, such as a resume, they should be using recycled paper for printing. Try to purchase more eco-friendly unbleached paper if possible.

-Green Earth Office Supply offers something fun for kids (and adults). They have tree-free paper, which is made out of sources such as hemp and even elephant dung! (<http://greenearthofficesupply.stores.yahoo.net/treetsampac.html>).

-Folders/Binders:

-Use recycled file and pocket folders. 100% recycled portfolio folders can be found at Green Line Paper (www.greenlinepaper.com/filing-school/cat_3.html).

-Green Earth Office Supply sells binders made from recycled computer circuit boards and recycled rubber. And Treecycle (www.treecycle.com) offers binders made from 45 to 100 percent post-consumer waste plastic as well as recycled cardboard.

Pens/pencils:

-Refillable pens are ideal, as only the ink needs to be replaced, not the entire pen.

-There are also disposable pens made of recycled materials. Try The Green Office

(http://www.thegreenoffice.com/component/option.com_virtuemart/page.shop.browse/category_id.37312/Itemid,10/) for both the aforementioned styles.

-Pilot has also gotten on the green bandwagon, and now offers pens made of recycled materials (<http://pilotbeyondgreen.us/>).

-Mechanical pencils are good because they can be refilled with lead, but there are also more eco-friendly pencil options. These include styles made of recycled materials, such as old denim and newsprint.

Lunches:

-The idea of lunch brought to and from school in a paper or plastic bag seems pretty retro, but the use of an actual lunch box or reusable sack is back in style, and choices in material, colors and sizes make your eco-friendly options easier.

-Use cloth napkins and save some trees. Also, do your part to reduce landfill waste by using reusable utensils. Both can be brought back home the same way they found their way to school--within a lunch box or reusable sack.

-Steer clear of prepackaged foods, juice boxes and pouches, which create even more waste and use tons of materials.

-Finally, pack your food and drink in reusable containers. You not only will be saving money by not purchasing brown paper bags and by buying in bulk and divvying up foods, but you will be reducing waste all at the same time.

(Source: <http://www.thedailygreen.com/environmental-news/latest/green-kids-lunch-44071008>).

Etcetera:

-There are usually green options available for most office supplies. For example, some Post-Its are made of recycled paper.

-Other cool items include recycled scissors and push pins, biodegradable corn rulers, and paper clips made from recycled steel.

(Source for most of the above: <http://www.thedailygreen.com/environmental-news/latest/green-school-supplies-44071008>).

The New American Dream also offers some good information on back-to-school green ideas (<http://www.newdream.org/marketplace/bts.php>). They also offer a list of greener options for kids in kindergarten through college (http://www.newdream.org/marketplace/bts_list.php).



Events:

-The Co-op is hosting a farm tour on Sunday, August 17th. They are also connected with the "Eat Local America" challenge which will be from September 1 to September 15. La Crosse area residents are asked to "take the challenge," sign up at the Co-op, and try to consume 80% of their diets from food grown or produced locally. Check their site for details: www.peoplesfoodcoop.com .

-Don't forget to check out Focus on Energy's residential energy conservation fact sheets. They can help you save a lot on heating and cooling in your home (<http://www.focusonenergy.com/Information-Center/Residential/Fact-Sheets/>).