

Ask EcoGirl

By Patricia Dines

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Discarding Your Stuff — Ecologically

Dear EcoGirl: Where can I pass along my unwanted items to others? I'd like to keep them out of the garbage, and maybe make some cash too. *Signed, Cluttered in Cazadero*

Dear Cluttered: I'm delighted that you want to help reduce the waste sent to our overflowing landfills, thus lessening that environmental harm and the eco-costs of making and shipping new items. And, yes, you can also make money and feel good about contributing to others!

Waste reduction is especially vital in Sonoma County. Did you know that our local landfill was closed in 2005, because of contaminants leaking into groundwater? Since then, we've been hauling our 6,000 tons of weekly garbage to out-of-county dumps, emitting countless pollutants along the way.

The County can't afford to fix the landfill, and hopes a corporation will invest. But then they might also revive a prior proposal to dramatically expand the dump. This risks increased harm to our water supply, nature's creatures, and the sensitive neighboring Petaluma Marsh (California's largest remaining unaltered tract of tidal wetlands).

That's why it's so vital to significantly reduce our trash! Our actions do make a difference.

Making a Plan

1) Take stock of what you have. Start by gathering your unneeded items. Is there anything you could repair, repaint, or refurbish, for yourself or others?

2) Identify your discarding priorities. Which items might be worth trying to sell? Which ones do you just want to go to loving homes? This will determine your next steps.

Your Action Options

1) Sell Directly. With this approach, you do the promotion, meet with

folks, and keep the full sale price. Offer your goodies on local email lists, such as <<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/wacco-bb>>. Post them online at <www.craigslist.org>, <www.waccobb.net>, and special-interest sites (e.g., for cars). Or place classifieds in general or specialty periodicals. Consider who might find each item useful and where they'd look for it.

2) Sell Through Consignment Stores. This approach allows you to sell your more-valuable items with less effort. Stores will bring in customers and manage logistics in exchange for about half of the sale price (usually paid after the item sells). Look for places online and in the phone book under Consignment, Antiques, and specific categories, such as Books, Clothing, and Sports. Ask shops what they take, drop-off hours, turnaround time to get on the floor (sometimes 4-8 weeks), and payment rates. (See box for some wonderful local shops.)

3) Hold a Yard Sale. Best for less-expensive items, a sale allows you to make some money, reach more folks at once, move a decent amount of stuff, connect with interesting people and neighbors, watch shoppers delight in their finds, and setup a "Free" area. Also consider a flea market booth (\$18, 823-7874).

4) Giveaway Directly. To pass along a few items quickly, especially larger ones, leave them curbside with a "Free" sign. Or post on the above sites and lists, plus <www.freecycle.org>.

5) Donate to Charities. Support community groups, non-profits, and churches with donations to their activities, thrift stores, or yard sales. Contact groups you value, or look in the phone book or online under Thrift Shops and Charities. Some offer tax deductions. (See box for some great local outlets.)

6) Give Creatively. Consider who could use what's left. For instance, offer medical items to a senior center;

art supplies to a school or artist; egg cartons to a farmer; and a broken lamp to a repair store (to fix and resell, or use for parts). Even pencil stubs can be given to the library!

For More Information

* **Sonoma County Eco-Desk** (565-3375, <www.recyclenow.org>). Their website and Recycling Guide (under "R" in the Yellow Pages) suggest places to discard many items (including toxic ones!).

* **Book: Choose to Reuse**, by Nikki & David Goldbeck. Great inspiration, ideas, and resources for repair and reuse.

For The Future

* **Streamline by setting up an ongoing giveaway box or area.**

* **Complete the circle by buying used.**

* **Support zero waste projects.** These efforts seek to align our culture with nature's ways, where everything either becomes a resource for something else or returns harmlessly back into the earth. For more information, see <www.crra.com/grc/articles/zwc.html>.

So I hope this article helps you find useful homes for all your discards, now reborn as someone else's treasures!

Ask EcoGirl is written by Patricia Dines, Author of The Organic Guides, and Editor and Lead Writer for The Next STEP newsletter. Email your questions to <EcoGirl@AskEcoGirl.info> for possible inclusion in future columns. View past columns at <www.AskEcoGirl.info>. Also contact EcoGirl for information about carrying this column in your periodical. "EcoGirl believes that everyone can be a superhero for the planet. Then she shows you how!"

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Where to Discard

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Here are some local favorite places to sell and donate your treasures. See my Ask EcoGirl article (over) for more options and tips.

CONSIGNMENT STORES

* **Pine Grove General Store** (Sebastopol, 829-1138). Women's, men's, and children's clothing, from casual to professional, plus jewelry, accessories, furniture, art, and home decor. Pays 40% of sale price.

* **Shards & Remnants** (Sebastopol, 823-1366). Clothing and accessories "to make you feel beautiful." Velvets and silks more than jeans and t-shirts. Style important, mostly newer items, some vintage. "If I can't use it, I'll guide you to someone who might." Pays 40% of sale price.

* **Simply Chic** (Santa Rosa, 578-8044). Women's clothing, "high-end fashion that's trendy, funky, and artsy." Pays 40% of sale price.

* **Hot Couture** (Santa Rosa, 528-7247, www.hotcouturevintage.com). Bohemian readers voted this the county's 2008 Best Vintage Store. Authentic vintage clothing (at least 35 years old), plus accessories, are bought (outright) for resale and costume rental. Purchase prices vary. Sometimes will buy items needing repair.

* **Cotati Clothing** (Cotati, 665-9401, www.cotaticlothing.com). Current or vintage stylish fashions, including accessories. No fur, lingerie, or jewelry. Buys outright, either 35% of the expected sale price in cash or 50% in store credit. (They also sell new eco-clothing, made of organic cotton, bamboo, etc.)

* **Vicki's Secret** (Petaluma, 765-2807, www.vickissecret.com). Current-season high-end women's apparel and accessories in pristine shape, less than two years old. Pays 40% of sale price.

* **Red Umbrella Consignment** (Petaluma, 778-3499, www.redumbrellaconsignment.com). Women's clothing and accessories. Current seasonal fashions, bought within two years, better labels, excellent condition. Also vintage and contemporary

furniture and decor, art, and some hand-crafted items. Pays 40% of sale price, 50% on furniture.

* **New 2 You Consignment** (Sebastopol, 823-7377). Children's clothes, toys, and books, plus maternity. Buys outright for 40% store credit. (They have a children's play area plus a dollar clothes rack.)

* **Sweet Pea Children's Consignment** (Cotati, 794-1215). "Upscale Resale Children's Boutique," specializing in new and gently-used children's clothing, maternity wear, infant and educational toys, books, baby equipment, and more. Offers local handmade items. Pays 35% of sale price.

* **Zoe Clothing & Kid Exchange** (Petaluma, 775-3239). Women's and kid's clothes, jewelry, and bags. Pays 40% of sale price.

* **Harry's Second Hand Warehouse** (Santa Rosa, 526-7713). Buys mostly furniture, outright.

* **Furniture Consignment Gallery** (Santa Rosa, 523-3680). Furniture plus art, lamps, etc. Pays 55% of sale price.

* **Play It Again Sports** (Santa Rosa, 527-7678, www.playitagainsports.santarosa.com). Sports items, from treadmills to weights to ski equipment. Buys outright (30% of expected sale price in cash, or 40% store credit), or on consignment (50% cash, when it sells).

More places are at <http://consignment-thrift-shops-in-santa-rosa-ca.yellowpagesltd.com>.

CHARITIES & THRIFT STORES

* **Sutter VNA & Hospice Thrift Store** (Sebastopol, 824-4712). Donated clothing, furniture, and household goods are sold to benefit hospice care.

* **Goodwill** (Santa Rosa and more, 545-2492, www.gire.org). Donated clothing, furniture, and household items are sold to fund Goodwill's job training, placement, and support programs for people with disabilities and other special needs, and those transitioning from welfare to work.

* **The Clothing Closet** (Santa Rosa, 523-0550 x281/Peggy, www.gire.org/programs/profiles/csv). Donated women's and men's professional clothing and accessories are given to underprivileged people as part of helping them get jobs.

* **Sack's on the Square** (Santa Rosa, 541-7227). Clothes, jewelry, household items, CDs, art, and holiday items are sold in this thrift store to benefit two charities. Bohemian readers voted this the county's 2008 Best Secondhand Store.

* **Recycletown** (Petaluma, 795-3660, www.garbage.org). Accepts used paint, building materials, furniture, bikes, appliances, mattresses, lamps, pans, tools, clothes, toys, and more. Sale proceeds support this non-profit's eco-educational work.

* **ReStore** (Santa Rosa, 568-3228). Habitat for Humanity resells salvaged building materials to support their affordable housing work.

* **Computer Recycling Center** (Santa Rosa, 570-1600, www.crc.org) Drop off old computers and tech items, and this pioneering non-profit repairs, sells, and donates them to schools and others. Leftovers are recycled responsibly. Repair services are also available.

* **Public libraries** (Various, 545-0831 x541, www.sonomalibrary.org/friends). Donations of books, CDs, DVDs, art, and software are sold periodically to help support the libraries.

* **The Living Room** (Santa Rosa, 579-0142, www.thelivingroomsc.org). The county's only daytime drop-in program specifically serving homeless and at-risk women and children offers them food, information, and referrals. Their website lists donation needs, including women's and children's clothing, blankets, small toiletries, strollers, spiral notebooks, craft supplies, and basic foods.

* **The Legacy** (Sebastopol, 823-7520, www.sebastopolSeniorCenter.org/legacy.htm). Drop off cloth, sewing supplies, and craft materials for resale. They do some consignment. Benefits the Sebastopol Senior Center.