Back to school tips for reducing waste, cutting costs

Published: August 19, 2014 by the Central Office

MADISON - The new school year is almost here and whether you're shopping for new school supplies or packing for a big move to campus, wrapping, packaging and other waste can pile up quickly. From kindergarten to college, a little planning can help students and families reduce, reuse and recycle more while saving money and wasting less.

To help out, Department of Natural Resources recycling specialists have gathered some practical tips for reducing waste during the back to school rush.

"We know it's a busy time for students and their families," said DNR Recycling Outreach Coordinator Elisabeth Olson, "but with a few simple steps, you can reduce waste and save money."

Back-to-school suggestions include:

- reusing paper, folders, backpacks and calculators from last year when you can. If purchasing new supplies, look for those made from recycled content, and those that use minimal packaging;
- using reusable food and beverage containers for school lunches;
- donating or recycling clothes and supplies that are still in good, usable condition;
- recycling old electronics. It's no longer legal to dispose of most electronic devices in landfills or incinerators. E-Cycle Wisconsin, a DNR program, makes recycling electronics easier by providing a list of collection locations across the state for items like computers, printers, cell phones and more. You can search "e-cycle" at dnr.wi.gov for more information; and
- talking to your children about the importance of waste reduction and recycling, and to their teachers about teaching and using recycling principles in the classroom. For potential recycling activities, see the EEK!�Environmental Education for Kids! pages of the DNR website dnr.wi.gov by searching "EEK!"

Moving suggestions include:

- developing a plan to pack and organize what you want to keep and what you want to get rid of. Approaching moving with a plan will give you more time to think about what to throw away or donate, what to reuse and what to recycle;
- reusing boxes, cloth bags or plastic containers from move to move and using reusable or recyclable materials (including newspaper, T-shirts and others) to package fragile items;
- collecting clean, dry plastic bags and packaging film and recycling these at a retail drop-off location. You can use the plasticfilmrecycling.org directory to find a drop-off location nearby; and

- donating or recycling old electronics, furniture and other household items. Check with your local recycling program to see if they have a special recycling or reuse collection event to make it easier to reuse and recycle.

More information and ideas are available by searching the DNR website dnr.wi.gov for "recycling for all seasons."