

GREENWorks

Ideas for a Cleaner Environment

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Something to Think About Before Clicking on ‘Submit Order’

It’s become a bit cliché at this point – praising the wide variety of online shopping options during this time of caution while also lamenting the ever-growing stack of boxes and excess packaging that comes with it. Having the access to so many new options for online ordering, curbside pickup and delivery has been a blessing for the past year, but it also raises questions about how to balance online retail with sustainable choices that will reduce any negative environmental impact.

There are several steps you can take before and after online shopping to work toward striking that balance.

You can take your first action before you click “Submit Order.” First, practice a classic rule of source reduction and ask yourself: 1. Do I really need this stuff? 2. Is there something I already have that can be reused? As simple as it may sound, taking a few moments to answer those questions could save you the cost of what you were about to order and prevent the inevitable packaging disposal that would come later.

If the answer to the above questions is “no,” and it is time to rev up the search engine, start with local stores. Many stores – big and small – have adapted recently to offer more online ordering, pick-up and delivery options, and to keep it local also helps our communities. If you’re able to leave the house and pick up your orders, you would not only save the extra emissions from delivery services, but often save on the extra packaging in which the items would be delivered. Make an even greater impact by scheduling all of your pick-ups for the same day. Another couple of things to bear in mind while doing your shopping: Are the retailers or brands you are shopping from making sustainable choices? Can you find what you need at secondhand online retailers or through any of the community online yard sales?

When placing online orders, you can also save on packaging and emissions by making sure to buy in bulk when you can (to reduce the number of times you need it delivered to you) or to wait until you have a sizable list of items to purchase from one outlet. Make sure you choose to consolidate shipments if the option is available. The goal is to keep the number of boxes delivered down to the least possible.

Now, for the packages that are delivered, the question of how to dispose of the packaging arises. If you find the cardboard boxes are piling up, there are a number of things you can do with them. First, there could be places locally that will take them off of your hands, such as food banks. You can also often find people online who will take the boxes off your hands, such as on Craigslist, Facebook or any online community group. If neither of these options work out, you can break them down and recycle them at your transfer station.

Probably the most confusing for people is what to do with the packing materials. Is this type of plastic recyclable? Can it go to the transfer station? And what do we do with all of these foam packing peanuts?

Well, first, consider saving them for reuse. If you ship packages often, or even expect to do so around the holidays, having a stash of bubble wrap and peanuts stowed away would be handy. If you don't want to hold onto it though, there are disposal options for you that do not include the landfill. For plastic bubble wrap, you can take it to any plastic grocery bag recycling receptacle, usually found in front of grocery stores – make sure to pop the bubbles beforehand. Most office supply stores will take your foam packing peanuts for reuse. Lastly, if you receive a delivery and think the packaging is excessive or especially wasteful, you can write to the company and express your wish for them to either use less packaging or more sustainable packing material, like crumpled paper instead of plastic bubble wrap.

Have you found a system that works for you to keep the packaging under control? Let us know by tagging us on Facebook or Instagram @NHEnvironmentalServices or Twitter @NHDES.

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