

Sweat the Small Stuff

By Hillary Mizia

In today's global economy of big box stores and super sized fries, it's easy to feel as if the small actions we take day to day have little impact. Global environmental issues such as climate change and rainforest destruction tend to seem out of reach. If these are global issues, how can I be expected to make even a small dent? The fact is that all of these issues boil down to our simple everyday actions, and by taking a few small steps we can each make a dent. Collectively, that could be one large dent!

Consider this. In 2003, one beverage company led an internal campaign nationwide to promote cup reuse amongst their employees. An internal study showed that if 80% of them, about 45,000 at the time, reused one non-paper cup twice a day for 6 months, they would collectively avoid 500,000 pounds of paper waste. This goal could only be achieved if each person did his or her part by simply reusing a non-paper cup over the course of half a year.

The phrase "Reduce, Reuse, Recycle," or three R's, is an old favorite. Yet somehow we forget there are actually three R's, not one. Often we see the triangle, and think "Oh good! This place is recycling!" And while that is good, recycling is the *last* in the series of the three R's. We can all take action to reduce and reuse just as much, if not more, than we recycle. Considering global climate change, anytime we can reduce and reuse, we effectively reduce green house gas emissions, which have a direct impact on global climate change.

The phrase starts with the word "reduce." One thing that every person does in our society is shop. Shopping is a national pastime, and we all partake in some fashion. When shopping for food, consider one word: bulk. Here I am not talking about heading to Sam's Club and buying a pallet of cereal. While that will indeed give you plenty of cereal, it does nothing to reduce waste. Most of the "bulk" items offered at big box stores are simply many smaller, individually packaged items wrapped in additional packaging at lower prices. The goal here is to *reduce* waste.

When I say buy in bulk, I mean head to a store that has bins and bags where you can fill up with as much as you need in one package. For example, the Fort Collins Food Co-op has an amazing selection of bulk items. You can trade in that pallet for a Tupper Ware, or a plastic bag and get as much as you need. If you bring your own container, be sure to have it weighed before you fill it. That extra weight will be deducted from the cost of the item. Not so surprisingly, you will find that you save money as well as waste, since bulk items, being void of packaging, are less in price.

The second of the three R's is "reuse." Reducing and reusing often go hand in hand, the ultimate two for one deal. On that trip to the grocery store to reduce waste, consider bringing grocery bags with you. Most grocery stores, and some other types of shops, offer a discount for bag reuse. These can be paper or plastic bags from a previous purchase, however you can take it one step further. Many stores sell groovy canvas,

hemp, or cotton bags that can be used for all your shopping trips: grocery store, clothing store, movie rental, gift shop, etc.

I'll only make one statement about recycling. It means little if you do not buy recycled products. The ability to recycle can only exist if there is a market for the materials collected through recycling centers. If those materials are turned into goods that no one buys, the system collapses. So while we go about choosing things to buy, we can all look for items that are recycled or come in recycled packaging. And then of course we have to recycle them in the end.

There are many ways to reduce, reuse and recycle. Starting at the grocery store is a great place to get the hang of it. Next stop? The computer. Reduce. Ask yourself if what you are about to print really needs to be printed. Can you simply jot it down in your day planner? Will someone else at the meeting be bringing hard copies? Reuse. If you must print it out, you have two options: print double-sided, or print on the blank side of a one-page document. The last step is obvious. If you can't remember, just look for those green arrows.