

SHORE STEWARDS NEWS

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This issue was written by Scott Chase, Shore Stewards Coordinator in Island County

Many of the common household items we use on a regular basis contain toxic substances. In everyday use, these items pose no danger to our health. It's only when we dispose of them that we should consider the risk. Recycling or proper disposal prevents toxic components from reaching the environment, including our marine waters and ground water, and is typically free and simple to do.

Disposal of Electronic Waste & Fluorescent Bulbs

Mercury is a persistent bioaccumulative neurotoxin that is found in several common home and office products. According to the Washington Department of Health, human exposure to mercury is almost entirely from eating fish, which is a health concern to women of childbearing age and children. When the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency sampled fish caught in Washington state waters, almost 30% had mercury levels that exceeded EPA's safety exposure limit for women of childbearing age. Though there are many sources of mercury in our environment, it is important that we make sure that none of the mercury in our household products makes it into our water bodies or landfills.

Many electronics we use every day, including our computers and televisions, contain toxic materials such as mercury, lead and cadmium. Through a new program in our state, those items can be taken to a select recycle center and disposed of for free. Accepted items include televisions, computer monitors, computer CPU towers, and portable or laptop computers. These will be disassembled to recover plastic, metals and glass for recycling under Department of Ecology guidelines. Since the beginning of the year, Island County has recycled over 390,000 pounds of these electronics, and over 33,000,000 pounds have been recycled state-wide through October 2009. (To see updated electronics recycling statistics by county and for the state, go to the Washington Materials Management and Financing Authority website at: <http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/swfa/eproductrecycle/docs/2009>)

Recyclers of electronic items that are not eligible for the free E-Cycle Washington program, such as keyboards, fax machines, modems, printers, DVD and VCR players, can be found by visiting www.ecyclewashington.org, or by phoning 1-800-RECYCLE



Many households have saved energy after switching to compact fluorescent light bulbs, and many home shops and garages are lit with fluorescent tubes. Fluorescent lights use about ¼ the energy of conventional light bulbs, and last up to ten times longer. Each fluorescent light, however, contains a small amount of mercury, and it is estimated that each year broken fluorescent tubes release up to 500 pounds of mercury into our state's environment.

It is critical to recycle fluorescent lamps and not dispose of them in the trash. Breakage releases the mercury vapor into your breathing zone and into the atmosphere, where it is absorbed by plankton in Puget Sound and then enters the food chain. You can recycle these at your nearest county recycle center. Compact fluorescent light bulbs can also be recycled at Home Depot and some other retail stores.



At left is an example of a bulb container made from an empty beverage container. Wad up some waste paper and put it in the bottom of each beverage slot, then place bulbs into the container for transport to the recycling location. To download “Mercury-containing Light Bulb” label that you can print on your home printer, go to the Department of Ecology website at the link below the photos.

http://www.ecy.wa.gov/mercury/mercury_light_bulbs_storage.html

What to Do With Your Used Batteries

The common household uses a large number of batteries to power phones, toys, flashlights, smoke detectors, and other devices. These batteries contain a variety of toxic chemicals, but can also be recycled for free at our county recycle centers. According to Jerry Mingo, Public Works Recycle & Hazardous Waste Coordinator, “Island County sorts and ships household batteries by chemistry type for respective recycling, hazardous waste disposal or treatment and disposal with household trash. Because of documented fires in transport vehicles, waste facilities, and even in one Whidbey Island home, the Federal Department of Transportation now requires us to insulate exposed battery terminals prior to transport. In 2008, we shipped over 18,000 pounds of lithium, alkaline, mercuric oxide, silver oxide, nickel-cadmium, and other household batteries.” He adds, “The safest practice and biggest help is for residents to cover exposed terminals of old batteries with clear packing tape before storing them at home for eventual disposal or recycling at a County facility”.

Photo at right shows ends of batteries being covered with packing tape. When ends of batteries touch, they can create a spark. If there is paper or another combustible material nearby, this can cause a fire.



Photo courtesy of Melissa Russell

Where to Dispose of Your Electronic Waste, Light Bulbs and Batteries

Island County recycle centers are located at the following locations:

COUPEVILLE: 20018 SR 20 open 9:30 am – 5 pm daily;

OAK HARBOR: 3151 N. Oak Harbor Road, open 9:30 am – 5 pm Saturday, Sunday and Tuesday;

FREELAND: 20014 SR 525, open 9 am – 5 pm Tuesday – Sunday;

BAYVIEW: 5790 S Kramer Road, open 9:30 am – 5 pm, Monday, Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday. (The Bayview location does not accept televisions, monitors, computer towers and laptops.) Additional information can be obtained by calling (360) 679-7386.

CAMANO: 75 E. Camano Road, and is open daily 9:30 am – 5 pm.

New Rules on Rainwater Catchment

For years, gardeners in Washington have known that an efficient method to water their yards and gardens is to collect the rainwater from your rooftop, store it, and use it later during dry periods. Though most people do not realize it, there has been some confusion as to whether you could legally use such a rainwater catchment system without first applying for a water right from the state. An Interpretive Policy Statement, signed by outgoing Director Jay Manning and released on October 12, 2009, clarified that a water right is *not* required for rooftop rainwater harvesting. This did not change the original 1917 law, but offered guidance on how Ecology administers the law. The policy now states that Washington residents can now collect rainwater for use on-site without a water right permit. You can see a focus sheet on this subject by going to: <http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/rules/images/pdf/pol1017.pdf>

According to the Ecology website, “Once you have collected the rainwater there are no limitations on its use. If and when the department determines that rooftop or guzzler rainwater harvesting systems are likely to negatively affect instream values or existing water rights, local restrictions may be set in place to govern subsequent new systems (there are currently no restrictions). However, Ecology generally does not expect the collection of harvested rainwater to cause problems or reduce the amount of runoff that would have occurred from the site in its natural, pre-development state.”

“The rainwater storage system may also be used for rainwater collection to store groundwater withdrawn under the groundwater permit exemption for future beneficial use (i.e. an owner may pump groundwater in the winter under the permit exemption, store it, and then use it in the spring and summer). According to the new rainwater interpretive policy, an “on-site” rooftop/guzzler system means the storage and use of the rainwater occurs on the same parcel as the roof from which the water was captured.”

Rainwater harvesting can also help manage stormwater run-off. As water collects and runs off rooftops, highways, parking lots and paved streets, it picks up pollution from these surfaces: fertilizers, pesticides, animal waste, oil and other automobile contaminants (brake lining dust, antifreeze, etc.) Capturing this rooftop rain will help prevent excess pollution from reaching our streams, rivers and Puget Sound.

.For more information on use of rain barrels and cisterns, go to the Ecology website on [Rainwater Collection in Washington State](http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/hq/rwh.html): <http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/hq/rwh.html> A future issue of the Shore Stewards News will focus on how to build your own rain barrel...

Sign-Up Starts Jan. 4th for Sound Waters University

Whether you go boating, fishing, or crabbing, or just like to see orcas, eagles, or herons - your life is affected by the quality of the water in Puget Sound. Take one day from your busy schedule and come to Sound Waters 2010 on Feb 6th, 2010 in Coupeville to learn for yourself. Whatever you have always wanted to know about island living, chances are you will find the answers in one place. Anyone can attend – no prior experience necessary. Sound Waters is an instant antidote to the winter blahs -- a chance to head out with a friend or spouse for a day of learning and discovery. In the last few years this annual event has emerged as one of the top highlights of winter for hundreds of Island County residents.

Start the day by listening to Nat Scholz, a Whidbey resident and scientist at the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). He'll be discussing the ecological impacts of toxic stormwater runoff and what to do about it. Then take your choice of three additional 1 ½ hour classes from a list of over 60 choices. Classes range from shellfish to septic systems, orcas to stormwater runoff, fishing to ocean acidification, alternative energy to rainwater collection, and much more. Classes are taught by university professors, authors, enthusiasts, private-sector experts, and county officials. But first, you should circle Monday, January 4th on your calendar, because this is the first day that you can register for Sound Waters in 2010. Classes fill up quickly, and are “first come, first serve”, so don't delay. You can register online at <http://beachwatchers.wsu.edu/soundwaters> , or call WSU Extension at 360-679-7327 for a printed copy of the registration booklet. (From Camano, call 629-4522, ext 7327.)

This “one-day university” is held annually at Coupeville Middle and High Schools by WSU Beach Watchers. Price for the full day is \$35, which includes the keynote address and three classes chosen from more than 60 offered, plus snacks and coffee. A catered optional lunch may be pre-purchased for \$7.00. Shore Stewards will be there with an information booth, alongside many other organizations that care about Whidbey and Camano islands and Puget Sound.



This product is funded by the Island County Marine Resources Committee and the Northwest Straits Commission. You can view the Marine Resources Committee website at

www.islandcountymrc.org

The website for the Northwest Straits Commission can be seen at <http://www.nwstraits.org/>

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If you would like to download or view previous Shore Steward newsletters, please visit www.shorestewards.wsu.edu/island/newsletter . Your Shore Steward Coordinator is Scott Chase, (360)387-3443, ext 258, or email at shorestewards@wsu.edu .