



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

Press Release

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MWRD: Make “new” items with recycled materials and forego plastic bags to celebrate America Recycles Day

A wallet made from newspaper scraps. A pair of boots made from clothing remnants. A handbag made from leftover seat upholstery or blue jean pants. These are just some of the “new” shabby-chic items that can be made using a little creativity and discards that may have been previously sent to a landfill.

Since America Recycles Day began on November 15, 1997, the country has increasingly focused attention on recycling. What started as a simple push to encourage individuals to collect aluminum cans and bottles for deposit at a recycling facility has grown tenfold. Not only are recycling efforts more commonplace, but reusing discards for new purposes is a growing trend.

Businesses, industries, government agencies, nonprofit organizations, and individuals nationwide have joined together to focus attention on the importance of recycling, reusing recycled materials and buying recycled products.

“Separating aluminum cans, plastic bottles, and newspapers in their respective recycling bins has grown exponentially throughout the country, but now we are seeing entire companies emerging based on reusing materials that already exist,” said Commissioner Kathleen Meany, chairman of the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago’s (MWRD’s) Public Information and Education committee. “Some en-

trepreneurial boutiques are charging hundreds of dollars for merchandise that has been constructed with reused materials.”

One item that has yet to find a home as a reusable resource are polyethylene bags, usually offered at no cost at grocery and other stores. These bags are provided to customers as a short-term convenience, but they have long term consequences. Plastic bags are produced from low density polyethylene so they are not biodegradable. As a result, it takes hundreds of years for just one to decompose.

When it comes to water quality, the MWRD finds that plastic bags are one of the biggest polluters. With as many as a trillion plastic bags in circulation, they can be problematic to Chicago area waterways. Because they are lightweight, the wind can carry them into sewers and/or waterways. Besides being unsightly, they can clog drainage systems and contribute to flooding.

Plastic bags are also an environmental hazard and detrimental to wildlife. Birds, fish and other animals can mistake them for food or become entangled in them. Therefore, it is important to make sure the use of these bags is limited and to find alternatives.

Paper bags are one possible option but they also take their toll on the environment. The use of trees to increase the



MWRD Commissioner Kathleen Meany, chairman of the MWRD’s Public Information and Education committee, displays some of her recycled bags.

production of paper products combined with the increased energy that is required to make paper bags can have a negative environmental effect.

Reusable plastic bags are stronger and more durable and can be used for three to five trips to the store. An even better option is a reusable cloth bag which will endure for many years.

For more information about America Recycles Day, visit www.americarecyclesday.org. Additional information about the MWRD can be found at www.mwr.org.

*Established in 1889, the MWRD (www.mwr.org) is an award-winning, special purpose government agency responsible for wastewater treatment and stormwater management in Cook County, Illinois. **Our water environment, take it personally.***