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61 Protect the planet, protect your wallet

Earth Day, April 22, is here, and many Missourians are looking for ways to lessen their negative impact on the environment. While everyone knows how important it is to reduce, reuse and recycle, many are afraid of what it may cost them to “go green.”

It may alleviate some fear, however, to know consumers can actually save from going green – and without spending a dime. Reducing, reusing and recycling are often free of cost and have high and promising returns on investment.

Reduction in consumption and energy usage is key to saving money and the planet. Many reductions can be made by simply evaluating technology use. Technical experts such as Dustin Dunstedter of Socket, a Missouri phone and Internet provider, suggest actions as small as managing standby power use can make a big difference.

“When you aren’t using appliances and electronics, turn them off and – more importantly – unplug them,” Dunstedter said. “When you leave your computer and other electronics on or even just plugged in, you are actually using energy and racking up your electricity bill.”

According to Alan Meier, an energy analyst, residential consumers in the United States spend \$5 billion every year on idle current – or energy used to power appliances and electronics that were idle or off – the equivalent of 5 percent of all energy use. In an effort to reduce, Dunstedter also encourages people to replace old computer monitors with LCD monitors – which use one-third as much energy – and replace screen savers with a setting to turn off the monitor, since it saves energy and increases the lifespan of a monitor.

Reusing items will save

landfills from overflowing, the planet from losing natural resources and pocketbooks from paying for something again. According to InfoTrends, Americans use more than 600 million ink cartridges a year. To reuse old ink cartridges, and as a cheaper alternative, try taking them to a store that specializes in refilling them instead of purchasing new ones.

Electronics are another great reusable item. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, Americans in 2005 disposed of 304 million TVs, VCRs, cell phones, computers and monitors – two-thirds of which still worked.

The EPA estimates that between 1.5 and 1.9 million tons of those discarded electronics in 2005 ended up in landfills where they will never decompose. Web sites like Gazelle.com are willing to pay consumers for used electronics; if the electronics are not worth

any money, the site will pay for shipping costs to properly recycle the items.

“By using or selling the electronics you already have, not only do you save or make money, but you conserve the amount of resources and energy it takes to create them,” Dunstedter said.

Finally, recycle items that cannot be reduced or reused – many recycling centers and Web sites offer small monetary incentives for bringing in recyclables. Some recycling centers are willing to pay per pound for aluminum. Recycling is a great way to save the planet by reforming and reusing natural and non-renewable resources.

The common misconception of “going green” is that it costs a lot of green. But by merely adapting lifestyles to the rules of the three Rs – reduce, reuse and recycle – consumers can save big bucks while protecting the planet for years to come.