

# Understanding Our Environment

## Five Environmental Questions Never Asked

(NAPS)—Simple “green” living ideas are everywhere—from billboards to T-shirts—but there are less common, yet equally important, environmental issues.

### 1. What is the impact of composting?

Composting, the process of converting organic materials into soil, is a simple way to reduce garbage by one-third and preserve living organisms. According to Composters.com, compostable waste makes up 30 percent of garbage in the United States. In 1999, the EPA recorded that 64 million tons of materials were saved from landfills by composting and recycling. Now, just think how much waste can be saved if composting becomes as common as recycling. Web sites such as Compost.org provide easy-to-use home-composting guides. Did you know tea bags, coffee grounds and corn husks can be composted?

### 2. Can print cartridges be recycled?

Yes. In fact, many manufacturers offer print cartridge recycling free of charge. For example, HP offers free recycling for its ink and toner cartridges through the HP Planet Partners program and makes sure all HP cartridges returned through Planet Partners are recycled and diverted from landfills. Many companies that refill or remanufacture print cartridges are private and not required to disclose end-of-life recycling processes. A Gartner Research study stated: “While the use of remanufactured supplies can reduce initial acquisition costs and prevent cartridges [from] going to landfills, organizations must understand that many



**HP print cartridges being unloaded for recycling.**

remanufacturers do not have proper disposal practices, and their efforts may not be environmentally sound.” No matter where you buy print cartridges, be sure to research the company’s recycling policies and standards.

### 3. Paper or Plastic?

Many people know that plastic is harmful to the environment. Recently, the city of San Francisco implemented a ban on using non-recyclable plastic bags in grocery stores, saving nearly 5 million bags a month from landfills. Plastic bags are not the only villain; paper bags require more than double the amount of energy to manufacture and transport than plastic bags, according to the Environmental Literacy Council. The trend is catching on, and cities across the nation, such as Seattle, are working towards “green” fees for disposable bags and encouraging the use of reusable bags in grocery stores.

### 4. Is it important to purchase organic cleaners?

Harmful pollutants in cleaners

put people at risk in their homes and negatively effect water and air quality. Organic cleaners have less toxicity, low volatile organic compounds (VOCs) and are biodegradable. According to the EPA, cleaners with high VOC content contribute to smog formation. Ingredients containing phosphorus or nitrogen evaporate into the air and pollute bodies of water, affecting numerous wildlife species. It’s important to think about organic cleaners when cleaning a home but also when searching for professional cleaning services such as housekeepers, car detailing and dry cleaning.

### 5. How do I know what can be recycled?

Understanding what can and cannot be recycled is a significant step toward helping the environment. Many people spend 40 hours a week sitting at a desk, where throwing away paper becomes habitual. Sticky notes can be recycled; tissues cannot. Food wrappers or soiled products cannot be recycled. Magazines, soda cans, juice bottles (both plastic and glass) and even most lotion bottles can be recycled. You may be surprised what can be recycled, even things without a recycle symbol can sometimes be recycled, such as dry cleaning wire hangers and worn-out tennis shoes. Web sites such as World.org provide simple recycling-education tools. Keep a “recycle only” container at your desk for one month. You may be surprised at how many workplace items are recyclable.

You can learn more online at EPA.gov and Compost.org.