



# ECOLOGY NEWS

ACTION CENTER

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## Holiday Waste Guide

With the holidays here more and more people are buying gifts online from retailers. However, a lot of the packaging disposal information printed on mailers is inaccurate and misleading. Below are some common packaging types and instructions on how to properly dispose of them. If you have a packaging item not shown below, search for proper disposal methods at [RecycleBN.org](http://RecycleBN.org) or call one of our expert staff members at 309-454-3169.



Cardboard boxes are always recyclable as long as they are clean and dry! Taking off the tape might put you on next year's nice list but tape on cardboard will not change the recyclability of the box.



Plastic packaging like bubble envelopes are not recyclable curbside. However, they are accepted at plastic bag collection bins found at local grocery stores. To see a list of participating stores visit [RecycleBN.org](http://RecycleBN.org).



Paper folders may look recyclable, and say they are, however the soft plastic packaging in between the layers make them unrecyclable. Packages like this go in the trash.



Bubble wrap or plastic air bags used for cushioning inside packages are not recyclable in our curbside program. These items can be dropped off at local grocery stores with plastic bags for special recycling. Deflate the air bags before dropping off at the grocery store.



Increasingly, packing peanuts are made out of cornstarch and are safe dissolve in the sink. To test, place one or two peanuts under hot water, if they dissolve they are made from cornstarch. If they do not dissolve, they are made of Styrofoam, are NOT recyclable and must be thrown in the trash.

# Preparing and Upgrading your Home for Winter

December is upon us, and with the start of the cold weather comes an increased importance in energy efficiency! Did you know Illinois is the 6th largest consumer of natural gas for household heating, and 5th in the nation in overall household energy consumption?! Weatherizing, or winterizing your home makes sure that it can handle the unique conditions that winter brings. Everyone deserves a home that is comfortable, efficient, and affordable to maintain. Additionally, an energy efficient home means cheaper utility bills and a smaller carbon footprint. Air leakage is a large contributor to energy inefficiency in the home. You may find out that your home contains many gaps, cracks, and separated joints that are leaking air. This means that in winter, your heater is running harder than it needs to be, using unnecessary energy.

Identifying where air leaks exist is the first part of solving the problem. An energy audit is the answer. The Ecology Action Center offers a variety of energy assessment options, and our auditor, Larissa Armstrong, is a certified Building Performance and Energy Analyst by the Building Performance Institute. On the [bnenergybright.org](http://bnenergybright.org) website, you can choose the level of assessment needed. From visual inspections of homes, to more precise diagnostic testing, we offer it all!

Air moves through buildings through a process called stack effect where air movement is caused by thermal differences. Warmer air is less dense than cooler air, so in the winter, your heated air rises and tries to escape out of gaps at the top of the house. As the warmer air rises, it creates a pressure difference, with lower pressure below and higher pressure above, and cool air from the outdoors moves in at the bottom. During summer, the stack effect is reversed. The hot air outside enters the upper portion of the cooler building and creates a draft down, pushing cold air out of the bottom of the house.

When air sealing, start at the top with the attic floor, and then head to the bottom of the house. Walk around the outside, and check all the areas where cables and pipes enter the bottom of the home to see if those areas are sealed. Next, add insulation to the attic, crawlspace, and basement in conjunction with air sealing.

The average cost of a tube of caulk is minimal, and the dollars saved by sealing gaps in the attic, basement, and around windows is significant. For every point that needs to be sealed, simply clean the area, insert the caulk along the crack, push it in, and then wipe off excess. After day, it will be dry. Caulking air leaks will save you money and make your home more environmentally friendly!



These are just a few things to consider when winterizing your home. If you are not sure where to start, contact the EAC for an energy audit! Stay warm this winter season, and happy holidays!

## Be Salt Smart!

You, Bing Crosby, and I might want a white Christmas, but with snow comes ice. Ice leads to slippery roads, sidewalks, and driveways, so people get out the road salt. Road salt is a sodium chloride product that helps provide traction for our feet and tires by changing the melting point of the ice so that it melts in freezing temperatures. North America started using road salt in the 1940s and since then chloride concentrations in ground water, even in the summer months, have significantly increased. The water quality standard in Illinois for chloride states that concentrations should not be greater than 500 mg/l in freshwater environments. However, in many urban and suburban areas, the recorded concentration of chloride often exceeds these standards.

Road salt helps keep us from slipping, but it also takes a toll on our environment. Road salt is harmful to our pets, cars, infrastructure, aquatic eco-systems, and water quality. To reduce reliance on road salt, this winter try to be salt smart by following the tips below:

### 4 Steps to Be Salt Smart

- 1**  
**Shovel first.**  
Clear all snow from driveways and sidewalks before it turns to ice.  

- 2**  
**Size up.**  
More salt does not mean more melting. A 12-ounce coffee mug of salt should be enough for 500 sq ft of driveway or about 10 sidewalk squares.  

- 3**  
**Spread.**  
Distribute salt evenly, not in clumps.  

- 4**  
**Switch.**  
Rock salt stops working if the temperature is below 15 degrees. When temperatures drop that low, switch to a deicer formulated for colder temperatures.  
  


*Steps To Be Salt Smart.* (2021). Salt Smart Collaborative. Retrieved December 15, 2023, from <https://saltsmart.org/residents/>

You can also be salt smart by making a homemade brine instead of using road salt. Using brine helps reduce the amount of salt introduced to our environment. Brine is only 23% salt and can be added before it even snows! All you need to make brine is road salt, a measuring cup, hot water, and something to spread the brine with like a pump sprayer.

First, heat up about one to two gallons of water. Then measure out 3 and a half cups of salt in a bucket and pour the hot water over the salt. Once the salt is completely covered by the water, mix vigorously until all of the salt dissolves. Let the water cool and pour brine into your sprayer. Use your brine 24-48 hours before it snows as long as rain is not forecasted before snow. To apply your brine spray lines back and forth across the pavement area. Just like with road salt, you do not need to cover the entire pavement. If you notice that there is salt setting in your sprayer shake it. Come spring, any leftover brine can be stored in a milk jug for next winter.



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