ECOLOGY ACTION CENTER NEWS

Volume 24, Issue 4 Winter 2024

BNCOMMUNITY COMPOSTING.ORG

HHW MCLEAN.ORG

BNCARE.ORG

recycle coach RECYCLEBN.ORG

BN ENERGY BRIGHT

TREE CORPS TREE-CORPS.ORG

mCLEANwater.org

sugar creek stewards

We Are All In

The Ecology Action Center (EAC), originally under the name Operation Recycle, was born out of the same environmental movement that launched the very first Earth Day in 1971. This movement resulted in some of the very first and most significant environmental regulations in the world, passed by a bipartisan congress and signed by both Democrat and Republican Presidents.

Over the past five decades the EAC has weathered wildly variable political climates, recessions, a global pandemic, and more. We, as an organization and community, have only been strengthened by these challenges. We have done so largely due to the broad-based support of the Bloomington-Normal and McLean County community in the form of volunteerism, financial support, partnerships, and much more. We are grateful to you for this long-running support.

As was the case in the first Trump administration, we anticipate significant rollback of environmental regulations and initiatives at the federal level which will certainly have regional and local implications. All efforts to combat climate change will need to come from local communities and state efforts. It is up to each of us to stand firm in our values, and hold each other accountable to future generations. We **must** leave this place better than we found it.

At this time it is easy to feel despair. While it is *yet another* setback it is not unlike the many we have faced before. We and those that came before us have worked far too long and far too hard and made too much progress to turn back now. The EAC understands that each of us has a responsibility to improve the environmental conditions of our community and pledges to hold ourselves to high environmental standards. It's time to roll up our sleeves, dig in, and work together to find new ways to address the obstacles and barriers that prevent us from creating a safe, healthy, and resilient community.

We are ALL IN for the long haul. How about you?

Exciting Air Quality and Energy News!

Michael in the middle!

BNEnergyBright Program Restart Announcement

The hiatus is finally over! After a long pause, we are excited to announce the return of the BNEnergyBright program! Our new energy coordinator, Michael Bay, has spent the past 3 months training on energy audits and energy efficiency, and just recently earned 2 certificates from the Building Performance Institute: The Building Science Principles certificate, and the Building Analyst-Technician certificate. With Michael's training complete, we are ready to restart home and small business energy audits. If you'd like to start making your home more comfortable and energy efficient, sign-up for an audit today at the BNEnergyBright.org website! Questions can be directed to Michael Bay at mbay@ecologyactioncenter.org, or at 309-454-3169 x 15.

Green House Gas (GHG) Inventory 2022

After completing GHG inventories for 2008 and 2015, we are excited to start work on our 2022 GHG inventory. This inventory will account for greenhouse gas emissions from every sector in our community, and will be expanding its scope to include all of McLean County. This inventory will reveal how much progress our community has made in reducing our greenhouse gas emissions since 2015, as well as what sectors are emitting the most or the least.

Community Energy Strategic Plan (CESP)

The Ecology Action Center is working on a Community Energy Strategic Plan, or CESP, for the entirety of McLean County! If you are unfamiliar, a CESP is a city or county's plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, improve their energy efficiency, increase their energy resilience, and generally decrease a community's environmental footprint. Unlike a pledge, a CESP outlines real strategies and plans, and lays out a timeline for a community to implement these plans. Many cities and counties across the Midwest have drafted their own CESPs. These include: Ann Arbor, MI; Bloomington, IN; Madison, WI; Chicago and Cook County, and even Urbana, just down the road from us. Once every strategy and plan has been vetted to ensure the best interests of the community are met, the CESP will be submitted for local approval and then EAC can begin the implementation. We will have McLean County's CESP complete by the summer of 2026. Plans and strategies will include: making new and existing buildings more energy efficient; increasing the county's energy supply from renewable resources; building resilient infrastructure; building more walking, biking, and public transit infrastructure; and making sure the most vulnerable members of McLean County are protected under this plan. The CESP will involve input from a diverse array of stakeholders, and we will be seeking applications for community members who are interested in being a stakeholder for this project. We are so excited to be working with the community on this project, and we look forward to helping make McLean County a better environment to live in for everyone.

Give the Gift of Sustainability This Holiday Season!

By EAC intern Grace Beyer

The holiday season is here, so it's time to start putting those gift-wrapping skills to use! But once the holiday fun is over, what should be done with all that excess wrapping material? Depending on the materials used, some things will head to the landfill while others can go to your recycling cart. It's important to recognize the differences in the recyclability of various materials to ensure that things are not improperly disposed of.

Below is a list of **things that cannot be put in household recycling** carts and must be thrown away if they cannot be reused:

- Plastic packaging
- Bubble wrap*
- Styrofoam*
- Styrofoam packing peanuts* (cornstarch packing peanuts dissolve in water!)
- Bows and ribbons
- Wrapping paper with glitter, foil, shiny, or plastic elements

**These items can be disposed of for proper recycling at some stores, check out RecycleBN.org for a list of participating locations!*

There are also some holiday wrapping **items that can be recycled** in your home and these materials include the following:

- Cardboard boxes (once broken down)
- 100% paper wrapping paper
- 100% paper gift bags without plastic or ribbon handles

Understanding how to dispose of holiday gift wrapping is important to maintaining a sustainable holiday season, but there are many things you can do before the time to unwrap gifts arrives. While shopping, choose to shop local small businesses or nonprofits like the Ecology Action Center! This reduces excess packaging and carbon emissions caused by transportation. Online shopping, while convenient, often comes with excess plastic packaging, bubble wrap, and Styrofoam peanuts that cannot be recycled, adding to gift related waste. When it comes time to wrap those carefully picked out gifts, opt for brown paper or newspaper wrapping that can be recycled after use. Better yet, invest in reusable gift wraps (like what is available at the EAC) that can be used for years to come. Consider no longer using or reusing non-recyclable items like bows and ribbons to further reduce gift waste. Keeping these tips in mind will ensure a sustainable holiday for you and others in your life!

Are Countertop Composters All They're Cracked Up To Be?

By EAC Intern Grace Beyer

Looking to invest in a countertop kitchen composter, like a Lomi or a Mill? Well, buyer beware: many of these devices, despite their packaging, do not create actual compost. The product packaging of these items can be very deceiving, so it's important to recognize key differences between the byproduct of a countertop "composter" and actual compost.

So what is true compost? Compost is defined as a mixture of decayed organic material that can be used to fertilize soil (1). Compost is made up of materials like food scraps and plant matter that is broken down together through the long process of decomposition. A period of stabilization is required for true compost to form, meaning it might take several weeks or months for your discarded food waste to become decomposed enough to be used as compost (2). Without allowing the organic matter to sit for a long period of time, microbial work will not be able to transform your discarded food into a nutrient rich soil additive (AKA compost). Many countertop "composters" include false advertising that promises composting material in 24-48 hours, which is simply not accurate (3).

It's important to recognize that countertop "composters" cannot create compost in the way they have advertised, and are instead merely dehydrating and grinding food waste. The problem with calling this ground up food compost, however, lies within the product design. Compost requires organic matter, air, and water, so the dehydration mechanism of many devices actually prevents any microbial decomposition. Microbial activity is what makes compost so beneficial for your backyard soil because microbes allow for compost to become nutrient dense (4). Countertop "composters" are good for reducing the size of your food waste, but water will need to be added back to the dehydrated food scraps in order to kickstart the road to compost.

Although it might be tempting to purchase a countertop composter because it seems like an easy and accessible way to start your composting journey, it will be more beneficial to you to skip it altogether. Instead of wasting money on a countertop "composter" that creates nothing more than dry, ground food waste, choose to set up a compost pile in your own backyard, start a vermicompost bin, or join the Community Composting Program. These other options will be much more successful in producing nutrient rich compost for your soil. For more information about backyard composting, feel free to visit CompostBN.org. To learn more about the Community Composting Program visit BNCommunityComposting.org.

Sources

1, 4: cdn.ymaws.com/www.compostingcouncil.org/resource/resmgr/documents/Connections.pdf

2, 3: www.compostingcouncil.org/general/custom.asp?page=foodscrap-dehydrators

Out with the Old, In with the New: Recycling Old Appliances

By EAC Intern Grace Beyer

Eyeing a new fridge, microwave, or other kitchen appliance for your holiday wish list this year? With so many new items on the market it can be tempting to invest in a new appliance for your home. But what should be done with those older appliances that you no longer need? Different appliances have different recycling qualifications, so recognizing key differences ensures that you can dispose of your appliances guilt-free!

Small appliances like coffee makers, microwaves, blenders, and toasters do not have strict legal recycling requirements like larger appliances do. These do NOT qualify for the e-waste recycling program at Normal Public Works. So, if your small appliance no longer works it is legal to toss in the trash. Although this is technically legal, disposing of your items this way can take up valuable landfill space. Instead, opt to drop off your appliance at a metal recycling location like Alter Metal Recycling in Bloomington if the appliance is mostly metal. If it is instead mostly plastic, it likely going to be trash unless you can safely remove the metal from the plastic components. We do NOT recommend taking this on if you don't know what you are doing. If your small appliance is still working but it's time for you to update, consider donation. Donation is a great way to give your unwanted appliance a new life. For a full list of drop-off locations, visit RecycleBN.org.

Disposing of smaller appliances can be fairly simple, but the same cannot be said for large appliance disposal. A large appliance is typically used to describe any refrigerator, freezer, air conditioners, dehumidifiers, water heaters, or any other big, bulky items. Many of these appliances contain chemicals that can be detrimental to our environment, including freon, chlorofluorocarbon (CFC), and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs). When appliances containing these harmful chemicals are sent to a landfill, the chemicals eventually release into the air and create a host of issues. Greenhouse gas release, ozone layer harm, and water pollution can all be the result of sending certain large appliances to the landfill.

So how should large appliances be disposed of? The Clean Air Act prohibits the release of coolant-containing appliances, so it is illegal put these in your curbside trash in most cases. Instead, a licensed professional needs to remove the coolants properly then any metal components will be recycled. If you plan on ordering a new appliance to replace an obsolete one, the retailer will likely drop off your new appliance and take the old one off your hands to be recycled. If you are getting rid of a large coolant containing appliance (such as and not looking to replace it, Alter Metals is able to remove coolants before recycling. Proper appliance recycling is extremely important to our health, making it essential to recognize disposal requirements. When in doubt visit RecycleBN.org, download the Recycle Coach app, or call the Ecology Action Center.

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The Ecology Action Center will make reasonable accommodations for participation in public programs and services. To request accommodation, please call 309-454-3169x11 or go to ecologyactioncenter.org/accommodation. Please provide two weeks advance notice if possible.

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