

Shedding Unwanted Pounds...of Junk Mail

At a time when many people are finding it difficult to stick to their resolutions to lose a few pounds, I'm happy to share a quick, easy and painless solution to shedding those unwanted pounds of junk mail clogging up your mailbox. Junk mail is a problem year-round, but particularly after the holidays for anyone who ordered from mail catalogs or off the internet. Since purchasing my brother a rare used book online for the holidays, I've already noticed an increase of new and unusual catalogs stuffed in my mailbox - all from companies that I've never heard of or ordered from. This mailbox glut is not ok—it's a huge waste of resources. On top of the vast amount of trees cut down and energy consumed to manufacture, print and send junk mail, it's also a big waste of your time and another opportunity for identity theft.

Recently, I discovered Catalog Choice (www.catalogchoice.org), a new website developed by three non-profit environmental groups — National Wildlife Federation, Natural Resources Defense Council and the Ecology Center of Berkeley — to help you get off the mailing lists of numerous retailers. Even for the electronically challenged, it is incredibly easy! Simply sign up and register your name and mailing address, and then choose to opt out of the unwanted catalogs jamming your mailbox. The folks over at Catalog Choice will then do the work for you by contacting the companies and removing your name from their mailing lists! It can take up to 10 weeks to see the results, and if for some reason you are still receiving catalogs from a specified merchant, Catalog Choice will follow up on your behalf. Think it can't get any better? This service is free!

As you know, junk mail isn't just comprised of catalogs. There are plenty of credit card offers, trial subscriptions, frequently flyer specials and more—so much, in fact, that the Center for a New American Dream estimates more than 100 million trees' worth of bulk mail arrive in American mailboxes each year, the equivalent to deforesting all of Rocky Mountain National Park every four months!

The direct mail organizations responsible for placing your name and address on mailing lists usually purchase lists of names from credit bureaus, credit card companies, banks, magazine subscription lists, warranty information cards and many other commercial services. To put an end to the annoying mail that consumes your time and our natural resources, contact the Direct Marketing Association (DMA) and register with their Mail Preference Service. The Mail Preference Service assists marketers in removing consumers' names and addresses from their prospective mailing lists. To add your name to the do not mail list, register online at www.dmaconsumers.org/cgi/offmailinglist or download a mail-in form. Doing so will also reduce the proliferation of your personal information, reducing your risk of identity theft.

For those without a lot of time, you can pay a small fee to a variety of online services to do all the work for you. A few popular sites are www.41pounds.org, www.greendimes.com and www.stopthejunkmail.com. This service also makes a great gift for family or friends, relieving them of the struggle with the daily pounds of junk mail.

The best bet to treating the junk mail problem is to stop it at the source. Every time you place an order online or by mail-order catalog, be sure to ask the company not to rent, sell or trade your

name to other mailing lists. It's amazing how far and how quickly your name can travel around the world of direct marketers. Also avoid filling out company surveys and warranty cards as many of these are only used to market your personal information.

Your junk mail is recyclable at the Broomfield Recycling Center, but before you head over, pull out all the plastic credit cards, address labels, CDs and other non-recyclable materials stuffed inside. Opened junk mail goes in the Office Paper bin and catalogs go in the Magazines and Catalog bin to be recycled. For your convenience, the drop-off center is open 24/7.

For additional tips on effectively preventing junk mail from accumulating in your mailbox and recycling bin, go to www.ecocycle.org/junkmail or swing by the Broomfield Recycling Center to pick up Eco-Cycle's *Stop the Junk Mail Monster* brochure.

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