



Back to School Eco-Smart & Wallet Wise

How can parents save money, save resources, and do something good for the planet while getting the kids ready for school? Pima County Department of Environmental Quality suggests trying one or two of the tips below to be eco-friendly and save money. Some tips require up front costs, but will last for a long time and reduce the need for future purchases while eliminating waste. Others will need a little extra initial planning and will reap significant benefits throughout the rest of the school year. All of the tips are a teaching opportunity to highlight the importance of conserving financial and natural resources.

Pack a “No Garbage Lunch”

Think reusable, refillable, and precious resources. It’s hip to be green now, so lay in the supplies for a no garbage lunch. Use a lunch bag/box/pack and fill it with refillable containers. You can even go chic with a washable and reusable cloth napkin or bandana to wipe that peanut butter off. Fewer plastic or paper bags and napkins to buy and our landfills will last longer. The water used to wash the reusable items is less than the water used to manufacture disposable items.

Carpool, Bus, Bike, or Walk

All of these are good choices for clean and green ways to travel. Bike maps are free and available at bikeped.pima.gov/Publications.html or call 740-3345. Check out the ride guide for Sun Tran trip planning at www.suntran.com or call 792-9222. The bus is a bargain and there are reduced prices for some students! Walking saves pollution and offers a cardiovascular boost. Parents can organize a “walking school bus” in your neighborhood to pick children up as the group walks by their home. Parents can alternate leading the group each week and the combined savings in gasoline and air pollution will benefit everyone.

By the way, International Walk to School Day is Wednesday, October 7th, 2009. Celebrate walking and biking to school as a means to promote health, safety, physical activity, and concern for community and the environment. Contact Pima County Department of Transportation at 243-1977 for more information and remember to ask how to form a walking school bus in your neighborhood and how your school can celebrate Walk to School Day.

The Wheels on the Bus (and Car) Go Round and Round

Riding the bus saves gas when compared to driving and reduces traffic congestion around school, but kids may be exposed to fumes that have been linked to rising asthma rates. Talk with your principal about creating a “No Idling Zone” around the school. Are there areas where bus drivers and parents sit in their vehicles and wait for the kids? Encourage *No*

Idling Zones at your school where drivers turn off their vehicle's engine while waiting. They will save money on fuel, as idling gets 0 miles per gallon, and we will all breathe easier.

It's in the Bag

If last year's lunch boxes, backpacks and other containers are still in good condition, use them again this year instead of buying new. You will save money, natural resources, reduce pollution, and teach your kids a valuable lesson about using resources wisely. Old backpacks too beat up for carrying books to school can be reused for other things like storing jumper cables and a first aid kit in your vehicle's trunk.

Make it Green

Those lists of school supplies can be overwhelming and a stretch on the wallet. Buy and use recycled products when you can; the prices are going down and many are comparable to virgin products, plus the kids think they are cool. Have you seen the cardboard notebooks, Capri Sun juice box backpacks, recycled money pencils, and old school lunchboxes? They all help close the loop by reusing and recycling materials collected. A refillable pen or pencil will long outlast a regular one and is much more sustainable. Taking inventory before you shop will also cut down on purchases; do you really need a new ruler, or a pack of 68 pens?

"New to You" School Clothes

Use reclaimed fabrics and "previously-owned" garments to help kids create their unique vision of "green" fashion. Hand-me-downs, up-cycled vintage, and thrift stores are great ways to get hip threads at very low costs.

For More Information

Incorporating a few new eco-smart tips into your back-to-school routines will pay off in many ways. Pima County Department of Environmental Quality promotes a healthy environment and encourages carpooling, busing, biking, and walking to reduce air pollution in our community. For additional information on ways to go green, please contact PDEQ at 740-3343 or visit www.deq.pima.gov.