

# REDUCING PURCHASING and CONSUMPTION – Mindful Climate Action

From the time we were children, we were taught to desire toys, clothes, and a host of consumer goods. And yet, while the initial purchase of a desired object can bring a burst of satisfaction, these pleasures are short-lived. Most of us end up with a mountain of stuff that we don't need, and many of us fill closets, attics, basements, and even expensive storage facilities with things we don't need, paying first for the stuff, and then for its storage. Done right, an Eco-friendly life should be cheaper than the alternative, primarily because considering the environment before you shop means you'll invariably end up buying less.

Before buying anything, ask yourself: Do I need this? Can I make it? Can I buy it secondhand? Is this the best quality I can afford? The last question refers to product durability and buying things that will last if you have to buy something new. Making a new product requires a lot of materials and energy - raw materials must be extracted from the earth, and the product must be built then transported to wherever it will be sold. These steps create carbon pollution. Mindful Climate Action suggests mindful consideration around all new purchases for personal and planetary health.

We're all familiar with the **3 R's**:

**Reduce**  
**Reuse**  
**Recycle**



They're listed in order of priority for reducing waste. Reducing purchasing and consumption takes the lead. The most effective way to reduce waste is to not create it in the first place.

Here are some ideas on how to reduce and reuse from the EPA<sup>1</sup>:

- 1) Buy used. You can find everything from clothes to building materials at specialized reuse centers and consignment shops. Often, used items are less expensive and just as good as new.
- 2) Look for products that use less packaging. When manufacturers make their products with less packaging, they use less raw material. This reduces waste and costs. These extra savings can be passed along to the consumer. Buying in bulk, for example, can reduce packaging and save money.
- 3) Buy reusable over disposable items. Look for items that can be reused; the little things can add up. For example, you can bring your own silverware and cup to work, rather than using disposable items.
- 4) Maintain and repair products, like clothing, tires and appliances, so that they won't have to be thrown out and replaced as frequently.
- 5) Borrow, rent or share items that are used infrequently, like party decorations, tools or furniture.

The Story of Solutions<sup>2</sup> paints the bigger picture by pointing out that economic growth – as measured by GDP – is increasing while overall human and environmental wellbeing is decreasing. We're told that a bigger GDP means we're winning! But in actuality, we're losing because we're polluting our atmosphere and oceans and exhausting our natural resources. By reducing purchasing and consumption we effectively sidestep the economy and lighten our carbon footprint, prioritizing sustainability and people over GDP.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.epa.gov/recycle/reducing-and-reusing-basics>

<sup>2</sup> <https://storyofstuff.org/movies/the-story-of-solutions/>

Beyond the 3 R's, there is a "buyerarchy of needs" with five alternatives to buying new goods, illustrated via a pyramid.

Environmentally conscious people consider each alternative from the base upward before buying something new.



We have one Earth, let's take care of it.



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