

# Unshopping: Things You Should Never Buy Again!

source: Co-op America: Economic Action for a Just Planet

## 1. Styrofoam cups

Styrofoam is forever. It's not biodegradable.

- **Alternative: Buy recyclable and compostable paper cups.**
- **Best option:** Invest in some reusable mugs that you can take with you.

## 2. Paper towels

Paper towels waste forest resources, landfill space, and your money.

- **Alternative: When you do buy paper towels, look for recycled, non-bleached products. Search the [National Green Pages™](#) for recycled paper products.**
- **Best option: Buy dishtowels or rags to wash and reuse.**

## 3. Bleached coffee filters

Dioxins, chemicals formed during the chlorine bleaching process, contaminate groundwater and air and are linked to cancer in humans and animals.

- **Alternative: Look for unbleached paper filters.**
- **Best Option: Use reusable filters such as washable cloth filters.**

## 4. Overpackaged foods and other products

Excess packaging wastes resources and costs you much more. Around thirty three percent of trash in the average American household comes from packaging.

- **Alternative: Buy products with minimal or reusable packaging.**
- **Best Option: Buy in bulk and use your own containers when shopping.**

## 5. Teak and mahogany

Every year, 27 million acres of tropical rainforest (an area the size of Ohio) are destroyed. Rainforests cover 6% of Earth's surface and are home to over half of the world's wild plant, animal, and insect species. The Amazon rainforest produces 40 percent of the world's oxygen.

- **Alternative: Look for Forest Stewardship Council certified wood.**
- **Best Option: Reuse wood, and buy furniture and other products made from used or salvaged wood.**
- **[Learn how to become WoodWise at home and in your office »](#)**

## 6. Chemical pesticides and herbicides

American households use 80 million pounds of pesticides each year. The EPA found at least one pesticide in almost every water and fish sample from streams and in more than one-half of shallow wells sampled in agricultural and urban areas. These chemicals pose threats to animals and people, especially children.

- **Alternatives: Buy organic pest controllers such as diatomaceous earth.**
- **Best Option: Plant native plants and practice integrated pest management. Plant flowers and herbs that act as natural pesticides.**

## 7. Conventional household cleaners

Household products can contain hazardous ingredients such as organic solvents and petroleum-based chemicals that can release volatile organic compounds (VOCs) into your indoor environment, posing a particular danger for children. The average American household has three to ten of hazardous matter in the home.

- **Alternative: Look for nontoxic, vegetable-based, biodegradeable cleaners.**
- **Best Option: Try making your own green cleaner using vinegar, water, and castile soap.**
- **[Find safe, green cleaners in the National Green Pages™»](#)**

## 8. Higher octane gas than you need

Only one car in ten manufactured since 1982 requires high-octane gasoline. High-octane gas releases more hazardous pollutants into the air, and may be bad for your car.

- **Alternative: Buy the lowest-octane gas your car requires as listed in your owner's manual**
- **Best option: Make your next car purchase a hybrid. Or ditch the car and take public transportation, ride a bike, or walk.**
- **[Learn more about green transportation »](#)**

## 9. Toys made with PVC plastic

70% of PVC is used in construction, but it is also found in everyday plastics, including some children's toys. Vinyl chloride, the chemical used to make PVC, is a known human carcinogen. Also, additives, such as lead and cadmium, are sometimes added to PVC to keep it from breaking down; these additives can be particularly dangerous in children's toys. PVC is also the least recycled plastic.

- **Alternative: Avoid plastics that are labeled as "PVC" or "#3."** Look for #1 and #2 plastics, which are easier to recycle and don't produce as many toxins. Use sustainable construction materials.
- **Best option: Take action to tell manufacturers to stop using PVC plastics, especially in children's toys.**
- **Find safe toys in the National Green Pages™ »**

## 10. Plastic forks and spoons

Disposable plastic utensils are not biodegradable and not recyclable in most areas.

- **Alternative: Use compostable food service items. Companies such as Biocorp make cutlery from plant materials such as corn starch and cellulose.**
- **Best option: Carry your own utensils and food containers.**

## 11. Farm-Raised Salmon

Several studies, including one performed by researchers at Indiana University, have found that PCB's and other environmental toxins are present at higher levels in farm raised salmon than wild salmon. Pregnant women, women of child-bearing ages, and children should be very careful when choosing fish due to high levels of environmental toxins including mercury found in many fish.

- **Check out our Safe Seafood Tip Sheet to see what the environmental and health risks posed by different fish.**

## 12. Rayon Fabric

Developed and manufactured by DuPont as the world's first synthetic fiber, it is made by from liquefied wood pulp. Unfortunately, turning wood into rayon is wasteful and dirty, because lots of water and chemicals are needed to extract usable fibers from trees. Only about a third of the pulp obtained from a tree will end up in finished rayon thread. The resulting fabrics usually require dry cleaning, which is an environmental concern as well as an added expense and inconvenience. Much of the our rayon sold comes from developing countries, such as Indonesia, where environmental and labor laws are weak and poorly enforced. There is mounting evidence that rayon clothing manufacturing contributes to significant forest destruction and pollution in other countries.

- **Learn more about WoodWise clothes »**

## 13. Beauty/Body Care with Phthalates and Parabens.

Phthalates are a group of industrial chemicals linked to birth defects that are used in many cosmetic products, from nail polish to deodorant. Parabens are preservatives used in many cosmetics that have been linked to breast cancer though more research is needed. Phthalates are not listed on product labels and can only be detected in laboratory tests.

- **To be safe, choose products from companies that have signed on to the Compact for Safe Cosmetics.**

[Learn more in our Real Money article, "The Ugly Side of Cosmetics" »](#)

## 14. Cling Wrap.

Many people don't realize that cling wrap may be made with PVC. #3 PVC (polyvinyl chloride) leaches toxins when heated or microwaved and it is an environmental problem throughout its lifecycle.

- **Read more about problems with plastics »**

## 15. High VOC Paints and Finishes.

Volatile organic compounds or VOCs can cause health problems from dizziness to lung and kidney damage and are infamous for polluting both indoor and outdoor air. VOCs are found in products including paints as well as finishes used for wood, such a stains or varnishes.

- **There are now a wide array of low or no-VOC paints on the market. Look for paints certified by Green Seal ([www.greenseal.org](http://www.greenseal.org)). Or, look for natural paints made by green businesses listed in our National Green Pages™.**