

Go Green this Christmas; Recycle Lights

When Linda Henderson of Toulon walked through the doors of [OSF HealthCare Saint Luke Medical Center](#) in Kewanee and tossed her unwanted Christmas lights in a recycling bin, she felt like a ton of weight was lifted from her. Her final toss was the end of an odyssey of trying to get rid of the lights.

Henderson volunteers for OSF Saint Luke's and was helping decorate the lobby with lights a couple of years ago. On the package, she noticed a website for light recycling. She was thrilled to have a place to send old, unwanted lights she had at home that had been gathering dust in attic.

So she mailed off a package to the Oregon location. Henderson recalls spending about \$30 on shipping only to have the lights returned to her a few weeks later. "They came back like a bad penny," she joked. Apparently, the location went out of business or was no longer accepting lights. So the lights were moved to her garage and remained there. Henderson had missed OSF Saint Luke's first-ever recycling drop-off campaign last year.

Now, even before the official start of the campaign December 3-January 11, Henderson dusted off the old lights and one by one, lobbed the tightly wound strings into the collection box next to the information desk at the first-floor lobby and declared, "Finally!"

She also quipped, "When your Christmas lights no longer light up your life, time to get rid of them."

Steve Looney, director of facility planning and operations for Saint Luke's says OSF HealthCare tries to be a good steward of the land and resources so there is a significant effort to recycle which keeps items out of the landfill and ultimately saves money because he says it costs less to recycle.

"We're trying to be green. If you look, I've got my green book. We track everything. We try to recycle lightbulbs, batteries ... just different things. So, the Christmas lighting project was just opportunity we could keep stuff out of the landfill," he said.

In the first year of the campaign last year, OSF Saint Luke's recycled 98 pounds of lights while [OSF Saint Mary Medical Center](#) in Galesburg kept 26 pounds out of the landfill and [OSF Holy Family Medical Center](#) in Monmouth prevented 99 pounds from being sent to the dump.

Looney says this season, [OSF HealthCare Saint Paul Medical Center in Mendota](#) will join the effort.

"We've kind of created a competition this year so we'll see who wins. I think we'll be amazed at this year's results." He added, "Once you get the first year under your belt and you have a lot of people with awareness, I think we'll do a great job."

In fact, Looney predicted the Christmas light recycling effort among the four hospitals will result in keeping 500 pounds of the no-longer-working wire and bulbs out of local landfills. Recycling companies such as Eagle Recycling in Galva, which has partnered to accept the lights, will separate the strings into raw materials including plastic, glass and copper which can be reused to make new products like slipper soles.

Holidays do create piles of additional waste. In fact, it's estimated household waste increases by 25 percent between Thanksgiving and New Year's Day, adding an extra 6 tons of trash to landfills.

Here are 10 tips for reducing holiday waste.

- Buy outdoor light strands that are wired in parallel. If one bulb goes bad, the others still work, so you won't be throwing away "bad" strands.
- Put all your lights on timers for energy savings and peace of mind while you're away.
- Children can give coupons for their time as Christmas presents in ways such as taking on extra chores, cooking dinners, watching a younger sibling or giving plenty of hugs and kisses.
- Give the gift of an experience: music lessons, lessons for a new hobby, a massage, a trip to a state park, or tickets to a sporting event or play. This is perfect for friends who want to try something new but aren't willing to spend the money on themselves. Plus, you don't have to wrap the gift.
- Skip the gifts altogether. Research shows 60 percent of gifts are unwanted. Why not donate to a local charity in someone's name?
- Don't wrap gifts. Hide them and give the recipient clues. Make the search a treasure hunt.
- Make the wrapping a useful part of the gift; put cookies in a flower pot or hide jewelry in a new pair of gloves or socks. Reusable cloth bags are also great.
- Consider a non-toxic reusable tree.
- Eliminate disposables or use compostable dinnerware and then discard in a backyard or municipal compost.
- Don't use plastic water bottles.