

Over the years, I have written about planned obsolescence. It means simply that products are engineered to fail after a certain period of time. From the book "Gone Tomorrow, the Hidden Life of Garbage" by Heather Rogers, I learned about other forms of obsolescence.

In the 1920s, Christine Frederick, a home economics writer, pointed out the virtues of what she called progressive obsolescence. She wrote that "It is the ambition of almost every American to practice progressive obsolescence as a ladder by which to climb to great human satisfactions through the purchase of more of the fascinating and thrilling range of goods and services being offered." Sound familiar? Here we are, almost ninety years later still trying to keep up with the Jones's.

After World War II, manufacturers began retooling for peace time products. They quickly decided that if their quality products never wore out, they would lose their jobs. That is when they began to follow a practice of built-in obsolescence.

General Electric had already started this practice in 1939 by manufacturing light bulbs that would burn out faster so consumers would need to replace them more often.

It was not only the quality and longevity of the products that engineers toyed with. They also invented the concept of "new and improved" models. The industry term for this is fashion obsolescence. It is prevalent in the automobile industry and started in the late 1950s when General Motors announced that it would overhaul the entire body of each model every year. Around the same time, Ford Motor Company hired George Walker, a former stylist for women's clothing, as its chief auto body designer. Their goal was simple: to sell more cars.

This obsolescence practice along with the emergence of the myriad of disposable products in the 1960s has taken away the consumer's choice to make thoughtful and environmentally sound purchases. "Yes, there are organic products being produced and big box stores are adding them to their inventories. But these green products are still packaged and most will eventually end up in a landfill.

What continues to be missing is producer responsibility. I believe that if a product is not easily recycled, then it should not be sold. Legislators and manufacturers need to stand up to the plate and take responsibility for throwaway products.

Here in California, we are lucky to have the California Product Stewardship Council (www.caproductstewardship.org). They help manufacturers include product stewardship into the items that they make and sell. They also encourage local governments to take advantage of these greener companies. Their ultimate goal is to keep stuff out of our landfills.

So, the next time you go shopping, grab your cloth shopping bag and chant with me "If I don't need it and I can't recycle it, I won't buy it!"

Relay for Life

Thanks to the Relay for Life committee for hosting a green event. Recycling bins for paper and beverage containers were set up around the track. We recycled 500 pounds of cardboard and paper along with 193 pounds of beverage containers. I took the plunge and recycled 10 inches of my hair for the Pantene Beautiful Lengths campaign. Participants donated over 570 inches of hair to make wigs for cancer patients.

Confidential Paper Shredding.

On August 16 and September 20, Vallejoans can bring old documents to VALCORE Recycling for free shredding from 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.. The service is open to all residents and businesses and is sponsored by the City of Vallejo and CINTAS paper shredders. INFO: 707 645-8258.

VALCORE Recycling Board Member Jane Bogner's "A Sorted Affair" is published every other week in the Times-Herald. For recycling information call VALCORE Recycling at 645-8258 or visit www.VALCORErecycling.org.

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