

# DO IT YOURSELF--STOP JUNK MAIL!!!

The volume of paper junk mail sent each year in the USA is staggering.

- The average person gets 1 personal letter each week, and 11 pieces of junk mail.
- Each person will receive almost 560 pieces of junk mail this year--that's 4.5 million tons of junk mail produced each year!
- 44% of all junk mail is thrown in the trash, unopened and unread.
- Approximately 40% of the solid waste in landfills is paper and paperboard waste; by the year 2010, it is predicted to make up about 48%.
- **100 million trees are ground up each year to produce junk mail.**

The world's forests (and the critters that live in them) are feeling the strain. According to World Watch Institute, 80% of all natural forests in the world have vanished, at the same time that up to 50% of all landfill waste is wood and paper. Junk mail transforms standing forests into landfill waste. Even if you recycle junk mail, there are still huge environmental costs such as ink, the energy to produce and deliver it, and forest loss.

With just a few minutes of your time, you can immediately take the following actions to dramatically reduce the junk mail you receive, and thereby reduce your impact on the earth. Taking the first four steps alone will reduce your junk mail load by up to 80% within six months. Additional steps are provided that will reduce your load even further.

## STEP ONE: WRITE TO DIRECT MARKETING ASSOCIATION

Send a letter to: *Direct Marketing Association, Mail Preference Service, P.O. Box 9008, Farmingdale, NY 11735-9008*. Request that they “*activate the mail preference service.*” List your complete name, address and zip code. Junk mail may reach your home with several variations of the spelling of your name and address, so be sure to list every variation. It helps to throw all the junk mail you receive into a file folder for two weeks to see how many different ways junk mail is reaching you.

This is a powerful action: listing with mail preference service will stop 75% of all national mailings. DMA processes 50,000 requests a month, and requests are kept active for five years. It may take up to six months before you notice a reduction in the junk mail you receive from taking this action, so **DO IT NOW** and be patient.

## STEP TWO: STOP UNWANTED CREDIT CARD OFFERS

Credit card companies may get the award for sending the most unwanted junk mail. Stopping this is one phone call away. Call toll-free, 24 hours a day: 888/5OPT-OUT (888/567-8688) to get your name off the lists of the major credit bureaus. You will be prompted by a computerized system and will be asked to supply your current address,

former address within two years, and your social security number. You can choose to have your name removed from their mailing list service for two years or permanently.

## **STEP THREE: TAKE DIRECT ACTION**

**A. First Class? Send it Back Unopened!** If you did not request the mail and don't want it, **DON'T OPEN IT!** Pencil out your address and bar code, circle the first class postage and write on the envelope: "*refused: return to sender.*" Do not add any additional postage. Drop in any mailbox and it will be returned to the sender, forcing them to pay return postage, which provides them with a clear incentive to get you off their list. *This technique only works with unopened first class mail.*

**B. Send it Back Using the Postage Paid Envelope Inside:** If you've already opened the letter and there is a postage-paid return envelope enclosed, circle your name and bar code on the return form they've sent, write next to your name and address: "*stop junk mail; remove from list.*" Put the return form in the postage-paid envelope they've included and drop it in the mail.

**C. Bulk Junk Mail:** The post office throws away bulk mail it can't deliver, so *returning it does no good.* However, if "address correction requested" is written on the label, circle "address correction requested" and treat it like first class mail by writing "*refused: return to sender*" and drop in a mailbox.

## **STEP FOUR: STOP MAIL TO FORMER RESIDENTS**

If you rent, you may receive mail for former residents. Two powerful actions will reduce this unwanted clutter.

**A. Bulk Mail:** Send another letter to *DMA Mail Preference Service, PO Box 9008, Farmingdale NY 11735-9008.* Write: "*please activate the mail preference service*" and include the name of the former resident, and the address and zip code (yours) that the junk mail is being mailed to.

**B. First class and some bulk mail:** If the former residents neglected to fill out a Post Office change of address card, or if it expired, you can fill one out for them. Fill out one card for each unique last name. Write "*Moved, Left No Forwarding Address*" as the new address. Sign your own name and write "*Form filled in by current resident of the house, [Your Name], agent for the above*". You must write "agent for the above". Hand this form directly to your carrier if possible, as your carrier must approve the form and see that it gets entered into the post service National Change of Address (NCOA) database. Entries remain active for a year and half. This is very effective.

Taking these four steps will eliminate the lion's share of your junk mail, but junk may still slip through the cracks. Follow the steps below to further reduce unwanted mail.

## GENERAL TECHNIQUES

Virtually all organizations sell your name unless you specifically ask them to stop. Here are some powerful ways to ask them to stop.

**A. Be Clear:** Whenever you donate money, order a product, or fill out a warranty card, write in large letters, "*Please do not sell my name or address.*"

**B. Don't Return Warranty Cards:** Product warranty cards are used to target direct mail to you. They are not required in most situations - avoid sending them.

**C. Donations by Telephone:** If you donate by telephone, say "*Please mark my account so that my name is not traded or sold to other companies.*"

**D. Call Your Credit Card Company:** Ask them to stop selling your name.

**E. Avoid Filling out "Contest" Entry Forms:** "Contests" where you fill in a little entry blank are almost always fishing expeditions for names. Avoid these.

**F. Catalogs:** You can go to most companies' website, click on *customer service*, and send them an email asking that you be removed from their catalog mailing list. Or, you can call the company's 800 number and tell them to take you off their list—be sure to have the label handy.

**G. America OnLine Discs:** These unwanted discs are particularly material intensive. Call **1-800-827-6364** to get off the list.

**H. Publisher's Clearinghouse Sweepstakes:** Get the Clearinghouse to stop clogging your mailbox by calling customer service at **1-800-645-9242** (8:30 am to 8:30 EST), mailing to *101 Channel Drive, Port Washington, NY 11050*, or send an email to [pch@ant.net](mailto:pch@ant.net). PCH will remove any number of names from a specific address, but you have to list each name exactly.

**I. Local Business & Supermarket Fliers:** Postal regulations mandate that all mailings be identified. Locate the address card -- the cards usually have an advertisement and a photograph of a missing child. Call directory assistance to get the phone number of the sender, and call to get off the list.

**J. Val-Pak Coupons:** Val-Pak may be contacted at 1-800-676-6878, or by snail mail at ValPac Direct Marketing Systems, 8605 Largo Lake Drive, Largo, FL 33773

**K.** To escape delivery of that pile of paper that always comes from Albertsons, et al., with the missing-child postcard, download the following form and send it to ADVO Consumer Assistance: <http://www.advo.com/html/contacts/removeform.pdf>

## **STOP UNWANTED PHONE SOLICITATIONS**

**A. Write to DMA Telephone Preference Service:** You can dramatically decrease the number of annoying and unwanted telephone solicitations by sending a postcard or letter with your complete telephone number including area code, address, and names of people receiving calls to *DMA Telephone Preference Service, PO Box 9014, Farmingdale NY 11735-9014*. Ask to be removed from telephone marketing lists.

**B.** You can interrupt an unwanted telephone marketing call at any time by simply saying, *"Please permanently remove me from your calling list."* This one statement will almost always stop a telemarketer in their tracks. If the same people call back, they are violating the law. Ask them for their company name, supervisor name and phone number and tell them you will be submitting a complaint to the Federal Trade Commission.

## **THE TREES WILL THANK YOU FOR REDUCING YOUR ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT!!!**

This Stop Junk Mail guide prepared by Carol Misseldine, Sustainability Consultant, Mill Valley, CA. Your comments, success stories and questions are welcome. [cmisseldine@mindspring.com](mailto:cmisseldine@mindspring.com).

*Information sources for this guide:*

- Brown, et.al., *State of the World 1998*, World Watch Institute, Washington, D.C. [www.worldwatch.org](http://www.worldwatch.org)
- <http://www.obviously.com/junkmail/>
- <http://www.nativeforest.org/campaigns/recode/junkmail.html>
- <http://www.newdream.org/>