

## Slow Buy for Fast Change

By Marilyn Knight-Mendelson

A year or so ago, my daughter's toaster oven broke. My son-in-law was adamant that it should be repaired, and so began a fruitless search for someone who could fix it. Everyone's advice was, "Just buy a new one. It will be cheaper!"

We have all had this experience. Mostly we cave in and click on Amazon. It is only when we are confronted with the grim statistics of how much trash we produce that we start to question the way we deal with our waste.

According to the Global Waste Index in 2025, each American generates more the 2,000 pounds of trash each year. We soothe our guilty consciences by convincing ourselves that recycling will take care of the problem. However recycling is not enough.

Only a small percentage of what Napers put in their blue bins can be fully recycled. Kevin Miller, Recycling Manager for the City of Napa, says we all should all try to "reduce and re-use before recycling."

In response, people are finding creative ways to address this growing waste problem. While some environmentally conscious individuals have attempted to generate zero waste during the course of a year, this is a challenging and often unsustainable undertaking.

Much more realistic is the "slow buy" approach in which people carefully prioritize purchases and give up single-use gadgets, fast fashion, and plastic items where possible. This is no easy task; it demands clarifying your values and reflecting on what is really essential. Less stuff means less resource consumption, less pollution, and less impact on our climate.

There are many resources available to help. Apps such as Next Door provide an opportunity to borrow items like tools and equipment, or give away excess articles. Refilleries like Juniper Station on Main Street in Napa allow you to buy products using your own re-usable containers rather than plastic packaging. Thrift stores in Napa offer gently-used and often stylish clothing that helps to combat the wastefulness of the fast-fashion industry.

There are still other ways to cut down on buying new things. Napa Library houses a "Library of Things," where you can borrow anything from ukuleles to "gadgets, tools, games, kits, electronics, and more," according to their website. All you need is your library card. Community Resources for Children on Claremont Way in Napa has a free Toy Library with educational toys and activities. (Discarded toys are highly visible in our

mountains of trash.) These services address the practice of re-using items rather than slavishly consuming more.

What about my daughter's broken toaster oven? In France, they use a "repairability index." Products are rated on a scale of 1 to 10 based on how easy they are to fix and the availability of spare parts. The index is mandatory for smartphones, laptops, washing machines, and televisions. This system combats planned obsolescence and encourages people to repair rather than reflexively replace items.

Just as I was wishing we had such a system to deal with our expired toaster oven, I learned about a recent "Repair Fair " hosted by the Napa County Resource Conservation District at the Napa Library in July. The RCD website explains that volunteer repair coaches "help you bring your items back to life while showing you how to do it yourself." Monique Byro, the Community Engagement Project Manager, reported that eighty people attended the Repair Fair and forty items were fixed, saving about five hundred pounds of waste.

I look forward to resuscitating our toaster oven at the next Repair Fair!

Actions you can take:

Support Napa's refillery and thrift stores, Toy Library, and similar businesses and organizations.

Check out Napa Library's "Library of Things"

Seek out or organize community repair events

Embrace a "reduce and re-use" mindset

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