

FALL HOME

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SUPPLEMENT TO THE RECORD-EAGLE

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Eco-friendly products becoming easier to find

BY ERIN ANDERSON
Special to the Record-Eagle

Most consumers want to help preserve the environment by making educated choices, but in today's busy world, sorting through all of the information on various products seems like one more thing that people just don't have time for.

There is also skepticism over the effectiveness of newer, eco-friendly products compared with traditional brands. However, basic guidelines can help make running an environmentally-conscious home safer and easier.

■ Don't assume that a product is safe just because it's labeled "all natural" or "organic."

"That's probably the biggest confusion that people have," said Tim Lampton, owner of McGough's in Traverse City. "Natural and organic products can be non-toxic, but it's not a given. Some of the most toxic things around are 'natural.'"

Next, check labels to see if POPs are listed as ingredients.

■ POP stands for Persistent Organic Pollutant and is a relatively new classification for chemicals. Rather than grouping substances by their chemical properties, they are grouped by how they behave in the environment and in the human body. POPs include numerous pesticides, dioxins and industrial chemicals. Any chemical can be classified as a POP if it: a) resists biodegradation and persists in the environment; b) builds up in body fat and accumulates in even higher levels as it migrates up the food chain; c) travels efficiently throughout the

atmosphere and global waters; and d) is linked to serious hormonal, reproductive, neurological and/or immune disorders. You can obtain a listing of all substances classified as POPs and their reported risks from several health and environmental advocacy groups, including the International POP Elimination Network. Their Web site is at www.ipen.org.

■ Phosphates are another ingredient to be avoided. They are an excellent example of a "natural" substance that can have an extremely negative environmental impact.

Phosphates are naturally occurring minerals that are beneficial to both plants and animals when left where they belong. They were first put into detergents because of their ability to soften hard water, allowing the soap to clean more thoroughly and to keep grime from being re-deposited on items being cleaned.

Once it was discovered how disastrous phosphates were to aquatic ecosystems, encouraging a proliferation of algae that is the demise of any body of water, they were removed from laundry soaps and detergents. Yet, due to the way a dishwasher works, as opposed to a washing machine, an exception was made for automatic dishwashing detergents. But there are some dishwashing detergents that are phosphate-free.

■ In addition to the Internet and catalogs, more products are becoming available locally.

Edson Farms Natural Foods in Traverse City carries a wide variety of products that are tough on household grime, yet easy

on humans and the environment. Chris Edson, co-owner, said that in terms of all-purpose spray cleaners for the kitchen and bathroom, citrus-based products do well. Citra-Solv, which makes a wide variety of biodegradable cleaners, soaps and air fresheners, uses the natural acidity of citrus to dislodge dirt and cut through grease without exposing people to toxic chemicals or require testing on animals. He pointed out that many national brands are capitalizing on



Record-Eagle/Jim Bovin

Toxic-free home products are becoming more readily available, such as these outdoor items sold at McGough's in Traverse City.



the popularity of the citrus scent but the majority of them are neither natural nor non-toxic.

Edson's also sells many other earth and people-friendly brands including Seventh Generation, which not only makes cleaners and laundry soaps, but also makes long-life, Natural Spectrum light bulbs, chlorine-free baby diapers and trash bags made from 100 percent recycled plastic.

How about reducing that bathroom clutter to a single bar? Dr. Bronner's magic soap — also available at Edson's — is an all-purpose, completely natural, 100 per-

cent biodegradable soap, manufactured in an ecologically sound factory. Dr. Bronner's can be used for washing your face, body, hair — even your dishes and brushing your teeth. Edson said that Dr. Bronner's comes in especially handy for traveling and camping.

At Traverse City's Oryana Food Co-Op, the power of citrus is equally popular. Heather Neitzke, receiving manager at Oryana, also reports Citra-Solv products to be some of their best sellers. Another brand they highly tout is Earth Friendly, which produces a wide-variety of products for

home, personal and even pet care. She also recommended their Dishmate dishwashing liquid, which harnesses the power of coconut oil to break through grease and grime on dishes. And its super-concentrated formula makes it economical, since a small amount is needed to clean an entire sink full of dishes. Earth Friendly also makes a cream cleanser that cleans and shines kitchen and bathroom fixtures and even scours and polishes pots and pans.

And don't rule out some of the traditional brands as automatically hazardous before reading their labels. Some of the more common cleaners can be just as eco-friendly as newer brands. Bon Ami, that old stand-by cleaning powder, not only works for virtually every scouring need, but also con-

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Sound systems for every entertainment option and budget need

BY JOSHUA ALAN BRADLEY
Special to the Record-Eagle

Ever since live sounds were "canned" by the invention of the phonograph in 1877, music fans have had a steady stream of new technologies to keep them entertained.

These days, when it comes time to buy a home stereo system, there are two main options: a national chain or a regional/local shop.

National chains, like Best Buy and ABC Warehouse, have hundreds of audio options, from the inexpensive to the mid- and semi-high levels.

Local shops, like The Sound Room and the Stereo Shoppe, offer less wide-ranging options, but specialize in the mid- to high-end range.

However, audio professionals across the board agree that the latest in sound technology, and what today's consumers are demanding, is home theater sound systems.

"The hottest technology is certainly home theater. It's driving the industry," said Greg Walton, owner of Traverse City's The Sound Room. "It's the latest and greatest advancement in our industry."

A home theater sound system consists of a surround receiver (which includes the tuner, preamp, amp and processing), a DVD player (which, depending on the model, can also play DVD-Audio, CDs, Super Audio CDs, MP3s and more) and speakers. These compo-

nents are connected through the television in such a way that allows for a full-theater, surround sound experience at home.

The number of speakers, and their arrangement, is key to achieving complete surround sound, say audio professionals. The minimum for a home theater sound system is five speakers and a subwoofer, which professionals call a 5.1. But Walton said that nowadays it is common to have a 6.1 or 7.1, to "really wrap that sound around you."

"Now, there's an increase in the quantity of speakers to the sides of the room and to the rear, which gives us a true feeling of surround sound because there are no gaps in sound," Walton said.

Putting a sound system into a house can be as easy as unpacking a box or as complicated as tearing down a wall. Walt Rising, also of The Sound Room, says there are two ways of installing a home system: when the house is being built, or retrofitting it afterward.

"When people are considering putting electronics in their home, whether it's just a stereo for music or a complete audio/video theater system, they really need to incorporate that in the planning of their home as early as possible," Rising said. "We can do it either way, but sooner means less limitations."

However a home theater system is installed, there are many equipment options. The easiest and

least expensive approach is to buy all the sound components prepackaged for one price, ready to go right out of the box.

"Personally, I'm seeing a lot of people wanting to buy the home theater in a box," said Chris Smethwick, General Manager of ABC Warehouse in Traverse City. "Right now, you can get a lot of technology for not a lot of money."

According to Smethwick, these systems start at about \$300 and get as expensive as \$3,000, "with a lot of stops in-between." He recommends the Bose Surround System (model 321) at \$999.

Mike Dunbar, senior home theater manager at Best Buy in Traverse City, also sees the customer demand for all-inclusive sound systems. He recommends the Yamaha YHT-740 Home Theater for about \$799.

"This is a phenomenal system," Dunbar said. "Later on, if you want to get bigger speakers, you have that option because this has a serious receiver."

To get full-fledged theater sound, however, the best way is the piecemeal approach-if it's in your budget. With this approach, each audio component is bought separately, meaning the receiver, DVD player and speakers are all purchased for their individual strengths and compatibilities. (A super high-end approach would be to further separate the receiver into its respective components, buying the tuner and amp separately.)



Record-Eagle/John L. Russell

Smaller progressive scan screens on televisions from Loewe are sharp and clear.

The Sound Room favors this piecemeal approach: "The most expensive way to buy home entertainment products is twice. The idea is to do a little bit of planning with some good guidance and start investing in some of the foundation products that will be with you forever," Rising said.

At this level, Brett Fisher, a sales associate at The Sound Room, recommends starting with a Denon Surround Receiver.

"It has it all: amplifier, tuner, surround sound, processing," Fisher said. "About 80 percent of our customers buy something like this." There are many

surround receiver models, with the entry to mid level around \$400-500, and the high end at about \$1,000-\$1,200.

Dunbar recommends Yamaha receivers because of their "ease of use" and "overall affordability." They range from about \$280-\$475. "They're by far the best stuff we carry," he said.

The next step would be to add a DVD player. According to Fisher, there are three realms in DVD players, the overall clarity of picture and price determined by the video quality of output: The basic 6-8 bit, \$100-150 models (Sony, Panasonic), the midlevel 8-

10 bit, \$300-400 models (Denon, Integra), and the higher level 10-14 bit at about \$1,000 (also Denon, Integra). Fisher recommends buying at least at the middle level.

Dunbar recommends the Samsung Hi-definition DVD player (model: HD931) at \$299. "There are only a few of these hi-definition DVD players out in the market. It's getting awesome reviews in all the audio/video magazines," he said.

Speakers are the final component to complete a sound system, but they are

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