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It's that time again. The New Year. Maybe you've already considered resolutions, maybe you've already abandoned them. I personally believe that we should simply try our best every single day (see, it sounds so positive and do-gooder-like and relieves me of the feelings of failure and guilt when I default!).

We live in an odd world. We know that plastic bags, disposable water bottles, cleaning chemicals and auto emissions are bad for our environment, and bad for us. Yet, we still drive cars, forget our reusable bags, buy water at the gym and spray toxic stuff onto our mirrors to try and clean them. We are trying to knock it off, but these things take time. A steady pace is great...as long as it's in the right direction.

*2009 is the year of the right direction, and to start you off on the right foot (with a lighter footprint), we present below our Alphabet of Avoidance. So, **A**void now **B**ecause you **C**an...but remember, our ABCs are only the basics (some letters could have had the limelight to themselves, but we chose to treat all letters with equal importance!).*

Antiperspirant

Do sweat the small stuff...that's how we can change the world. You may even perspire as you go through this list of things to avoid! And, before you next roll on, check your deodorant (and other personal care products) at [The Skin Deep Database](#) for safety. If it's on you, it's in you.

Batteries

Powering up all the gadgets in our lives with conventional batteries then dumping them in landfills creates a toxic mess. Instead, try rechargeables, and take a look at [wind powered](#), [solar powered](#) or [hand crank](#) eco-gadgets coming on the market with great force.

Corn

Go corn-free...I don't mean corn-on-the-cob or organic stuff, I mean corn-fed meat, corn-sweetened juice and pop, corn-oiled salad dressings, crackers and cereals with corn, corn syrups, corn solids, corn starches and more! Corn is in nearly every food that comes from a restaurant or a package (and it's not considered a vegetable!), so this is a difficult one, but you won't believe how avoiding this will change your life. Watch [King Corn](#) or read [What to Eat](#).

Disposables

Replace buying paper napkins with a set of cloth, buy a set of stainless steel chopsticks instead of wood ones in a paper sleeve, buy a [Laptop Lunch](#) instead of tin foil, plastic bags and plastic cutlery, ditch the plastic water bottles for a tried, tested and true [Klean Kanteen](#). The possibilities are endless.

Eco-Bullying

Screaming with arms flailing at someone who asks for their grocery items to be double plastic bagged is an eco-sin also... rather, promote eco-awareness with charm...awareness leads to more of us wanting and willing to do our part. Plus, charm gets you further with all anyways.

Fragrance

If it stinks, it stinks. Perfumes and anything with the ingredient "fragrance" can contain parabens, phthalates and other synthetic compounds that experts label as harmful to our bodies (and our water when washed away). As for air fresheners - open the windows, that's the freshest!

Gift Wrap

According to the Use Less Stuff Report, wrapping paper and shopping bags alone account for about 4 million tons of trash annually in the US. Not to mention, it's harmful during production, only used for moments and is not even recyclable! You can be lazy and cheap and use being "eco" as an excuse, or try using [RuMe](#)...a gift and gift wrap!

Hoarding

We all have WAY too much stuff. If you have it and don't use it, donate it, [swap it](#) or sell it. If you don't have it and don't need it, don't buy it. Less stuff is good, good stuff is better, better stuff is enjoyable. Don't hoard...savour or share!

Idling

Any time you stop for more than 10 seconds (except in traffic) usually is worth turning off your engine. Idling gets us nowhere. Quickly.

Junkmail

Think even of the term! Of course you need to get rid of it. And, the industry standard is a 2% response rate which means 98% of the resources making junk mail are wasted! Get on board the [Red Dot Campaign](#) for more details on stopping your unaddressed mail today (no cost to you, big savings for everyone).

Kitchen Crap

Seriously, do you need a separate appliance for each item you cook or bake? How many times do you actually use these items, and where do they end up "resting"? And an electric can opener? It's easier to open a can manually than it is typing 100 words...especially on a blackberry. SIMPLIFY!

Laundry Dryer Sheets

Nearly every chemical that touches the skin finds its way into our body. As a result, wearing toxic chemicals (basically what you are doing when using fabric softeners/dryer sheets) is actually quite similar to eating them. As bad as our screening processes are in this country, I'm going to assume that such products could never be approved as safe food.

Mobile Phone Mayhem

Just in Canada alone, there are over 9 million mobiles replaced every year. That is way too many annoying ring tones. If you must replace (watch the [Story of Stuff](#) before you answer) check out the [Charitable Recycling Program](#).

Nail Polish

When I used to sit feeling pampered at the spa, I wouldn't have been quite as relaxed knowing I was absorbing something similar to automotive paint into my body. My daughter and I now will pick out colours from safer (and even local) lines, but I prefer to be safest and have her skip it! Watch those removers too!

Oil

It's your paraffin candles (try beeswax), it's your petroleum jelly (try beeswax again) and it's way too many other household items. It's a possible human carcinogen that's banned in other countries but still found in our personal care products. Avoid anything with paraffin or petrochemicals...I know those start with "p", but it's just a spin off of oil.

Plastic Produce Bags

It is really fantastic that you're bringing your own bags for grocery shopping, but what about produce and bulk? Try [Credo Bags](#) - made in Canada...put local produce into local reusable bags. Now that makes sense.

Quasi-eco stuff a.k.a. greenwashed products

With too many "green", "eco", "organic" products to even choose from, simply learn to be an informed and active label reader. Understand and know what you are buying, where it came from and why you need it. If you can't understand any of that criteria, don't buy or buy into it. Check out the [greenwashing index](#) or the [6 sins of greenwashing](#).

Running Water

Turn the tap off while you brush your teeth...do you flush the toilet the whole time you are sitting down? Challenge yourself to a shorter shower, use less while washing dishes, don't fill anything up higher than you need to, including your kettle.

Straws

I understand that drinking straws can prevent lemon seeds from being swallowed (why they were invented), however, do you really need that plastic thing in your drink, and then does it need to get tossed in our landfill? There's a reason that straws are not allowed at the zoo you know. If you need a straw, try stainless steel, glass or compostable, which are at least better than the nasty plastic ones.

Take Out

Exactly. Take out the take out. Bring a litterless lunch from home, or enjoy dinner from your kitchen...just visualize all of the styrofoam, foil, cardboard, paper and plastic you'll avoid. If you are going to let a restaurant cook for you, just take your own containers when picking it all up.

Utility Charges

Not completely avoidable of course, but when you see those office buildings all lit up at night, are there really that many people in there working? Be an influencer and get your workplace to turn off more. And, make sure you unplug as much as you can at home when not in use, even your cell phone charger sucks electricity when plugged in, whether you are charging or not.

Volatile Organic Compounds (VOC's)

You can't see them, but they're all around us. They aren't listed as ingredients on our purchases and are most well-known for contributing to indoor pollution. Again, if it stinks, it stinks. Think new car smell, paint, carpet, furnishings, vinyl shower curtain, even the new Twister game mat. Evil.

Wool

Not just because I personally despise wearing it! Making conventional wool typically involves pesticides, formaldehyde, polyester, foams, dioxins and other yuckiness (wonder why it's so irritatingly itchy???) Organic wool comes from way happier sheep without the "yuckiness" so try it if you like the fiber!

X-Rated Household Cleaners

So, the labels on conventional household cleaners have skulls and crossbones displayed right up front and are sold in the grocery store and pharmacy. Seriously????!!? Get it out. Try an [Eco-Me Home Kit](#) as the easiest (and proven effective) solution.

Yellow Snow

This was my husband's contribution to the list when I was stuck on the letter "y". Yes, avoid yellow snow, and as you do, know that until all your neighbours, and their neighbours, and their neighbours (and so on), stop using toxic ice/snow melt and garden pesticides, you'll want to avoid all snow as a refreshment.

Zapping Your Lunch

When I was young my mother made sure I wasn't standing in front of the working microwave. It might be true that it drains less energy than an oven, but it can't be good to nuke and zap stuff in the micro, especially in plastic containers, if we weren't supposed to stand in front of the unit. Bring a cold lunch, or something warm in an insulated stainless container. This saves time too when you are hungry!

You made it through the entire alphabet (or you just scrolled down to the end, and I can appreciate you even wanting the conclusion, I know, this was a LONG rant).

*Whatever your current eco-sins are, don't beat yourself up or feel overwhelmed - instead, pat yourself on the back for even giving a sh*t, and making it through our Alphabet of Avoidance.*

Reversing long-standing behaviours and routines is one of the most challenging things to do. And we're in the process of doing it - let's just keep going, and bring others along... whether it's doing a little or doing a lot, the best way to affect change is to let others see you doing it. It will result in safer environments for our children and for us. And, that is the point! Move into the new year with a new plan. Simple avoidance.