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May 8, 2008

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War on stuff How to get rid of your unwanted things

By Heidi Masek hmasek@hippopress.com

The 1980s children's performing group Rosenshontz sang a song called "Don't Bring it Home," about not bringing more stuff into an overfilled house. In a nation of consumers, we tend to bring stuff home whether we have a place for it or not. And when it comes time to get rid of it, we can get a little overwhelmed. If called upon to deal with items a loved one accumulated before leaving the earth, the project can be daunting.

First of all, getting rid of stuff is going to take some planning. Sometimes it's harder to get rid of things than it is to acquire them. Frequently it's not as simple as just throwing things out. One reason is that many municipal solid waste departments limit how much they will take curbside. If you need an old couch picked up, you'd better call first. You could rent a dumpster, but again, that takes scheduling.

Or you might find it wasteful to trash items that are still usable or contain useful materials. You'll need time to find out who can use or recycle that stuff, and how to get it to them. Or you might find things worth cash.

After an initial freak-out, get organized. You can even pay professional organizers to hold your hand through the process. The great stuff-purge might not be a quick or easy chore. The trick seems to be to just keep going.

"A lot of people are scaling down, I think partly because of the real estate market," said Sue West, an Amherst professional organizer. She gets calls from empty-nesters who are downsizing and from others who realize they've accumulated too much. Her company is Space 4 U (www.organizenh.com, 765-9267).

One of the first things you have to do is actually "acknowledge that maybe you've got too much," said organizer Lesley "Jazz" Barnette. Then you have to figure out what to keep and "what to let go of."

Giving things you no longer need to a friend, family member or charity means that someone's getting use out of the thing. That idea can help people part with things, West and Barnette said. Barnette's Jazz Personal Management is based in Manchester (625-5882, www.jazzpersonalmanagement.com).

One way to go is to have a box for consignment, one for a yard sale and another for charity, so you can sort as you go, Barnette said. That way you can see how much extra you have, and think about making money back from it, which can make the process less painful.



Staying clutter-free

Organizers want to teach new habits and set up systems that will continue working for each client, West said. Some people just need help getting started and getting a good system in place. She also has clients who continue to meet with her. For example, she's seen many clients between about 35 and 40 years old with young children seek regular appointments. They want to manage the house more easily in order to have more time for family. West might visit monthly to cycle out children's clothes during one visit, or help sort out the pantry during another.

West also works with couples in which one is a saver and one gets rid of things. She tries to help each understand why one might need to save more or less.

Some people ask for a monthly meeting because they need someone there to make the organizing chore more interesting.

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"Everybody has a different sense of what too much stuff is," West said. Some are true hoarders due to some medical or neurological condition. Other people find just a few things to be too much clutter.

Get going

How do we get started, then? With West, cleaning out a room can take three or four hours. The client will be making decisions about every item in the room, which can be tiring, she said. For people who don't have large blocks of time, she recommends squeezing in 15 minutes in the morning and maybe a half hour each night for going through the clutter.

For those with tight schedules or a looming moving date, it's essential to learn the schedule of the town's landfill/transfer station/recycling facility and its policies. Learn their phone number and bookmark their Web page. Also, get the phone number and schedule of a local thrift store, preferably one that will pick up. You'll also need a plan of attack if you want to sell things.

Barnette encourages giving yourself enough time to really go through your belongings so you aren't just moving unopened boxes from house to house.

Realtor Grace Nelson has specialized in "Baby Boomer" real estate, helping folks downsize to 55-plus communities. About five years ago, with the kids moved out, she herself downsized from a large house on an acre of land in Londonderry to a smaller home in the North End of Manchester. It was perfect — new construction near downtown, but in a nice area, Nelson said.

For about three months she cleared out things that wouldn't fit in the new house. They designated the garage as the holding place for things that needed to go. She started with the attic, which after 20 years of family life, was full of the usual stuff, including items that had belonged to her late mother. Next they moved to the basement, and then they went room by room. Some of Nelson's kids' still had belongings in her Londonderry home. Nelson told them, "Either take it or it's gone." Then she called Goodwill to pick up unneeded furniture. They also held two garage sales.

(Note from the writer: If you know someone looking to make extra cash, hire him or her for jobs like emptying the attic or basement. The helper can move boxes while you go through them. The work will go faster, and paying someone hourly can help you stay on track. Plus, you might be less likely to descend into a family brawl in front of that person. Maybe.)

For those moving

Nelson was downsizing from four large bedrooms to three smaller ones and faced the same issue some of her clients faced: her furniture was just too big for her new rooms. "One of the mistakes people make is to try to keep their old furniture. A lot of times it just doesn't fit," Nelson said of 55-plus communities. She recommends starting all over.

West said a lot of what she does is help people figure out what they want their space to be. If someone is downsizing, she recommends concentrating on what the new place should be, rather than what is being given up.

Sound expensive? It doesn't have to be.

Denise Moser is a co-owner of OPUS (Other People's Unique Stuff). Business has been brisk at the Manchester consignment store, "especially in this economy," she said. People moving to a smaller place can sell their excess or excessively large furniture at

People with ADD might keep regular appointments with West if they know they won't accomplish their goal alone.

However, organizers aren't therapists. Some ADD clients do mention their work with a counselor to West, but not everyone knows if they have a chronic issue. Hoarding, for example, can be psychological. "I have, a couple of times, gently suggested that I may not have all the skills that they need. You have to be careful because no one's going to go to a counselor ... until they are ready," West said.

Check out www.nsgcd.org, the National Study Group on Chronic Disorganization, or the National Association of Professional Organizers at www.napo.net for more on organizing.

Estates

West works with many people in their late 50s or early 60s who either want help with their own home, or inherited the contents of a parent's home.

Furniture usually can easily be given to the kids, but going through books, pewter, photo albums and other small things is tough.

"The memories and the stories are just tremendous," West said.

Sometimes she happens upon the results of a need to hoard that struck many who lived through the Great Depression. After going through that process, people often decide to scale down their own belongings. Clients don't want their kids to have to go through the same thing, West said. "It's very painful. When you go through someone else's things you really learn a lot about them. I think it's hard for some of the families," West said.

She also works with local antiques dealers and appraisers to help clients figure out what could be valuable. A client took apart a frame once to retrieve a photo, and found insurance policies hidden in the frames. You can also take family papers to appraisers, she said. Barnette has a resource network to figure out what should be appraised and how to sell it.

West, a member of the National Association of Professional Organizers, describes her job as helping people move on in some way. She was in corporate business for 20 years before starting this career, and also helps organize businesses and offices.

"They've decided to make a phone

OPUS, make some cash and also find furniture there that fits their new home at about a third of what it would cost elsewhere. Moser and co-owner Dawn Dube are interior decorators and can help design on a budget. They carry work from local artists, as well.

Dollars and sense

There are other reasons for being careful about where you redirect your things and how you replace them. (And let's be honest: anyone who's emptied a house lately probably thinks long and hard before they bring home anything other than groceries.)

Walter Alderman, a business instructor at UNH Manchester, teaches a special-topics course called "Applications in Business Administration: Sustainable Business II." The spring course is focusing on local economies.

"Every time you go to a store and you buy something new, that sends a message back to the manufacturer to make a new one," Alderman said. Reusing means new versions don't have to be made, and the reason to avoid just making new stuff is mainly because of the energy involved, Alderman said. Issues relating to energy use right now are global warming and military conflict, aside from cost, he said.

"There's so much clothing in the world ... we could probably stop making clothes right now," he said.

What does clothing have to do with energy? Product life-cycle.

For clothing made of cotton, the cotton is probably being grown in an unsustainable way on a giant monocultural industrial farm with fossil fuel fertilizer and petrochemical insecticide using genetically modified seed. That cotton is probably being exported to a country that has low labor costs and therefore a global textile industry. That cloth is probably then shipped back to the U.S. as name-brand attire. "So the amount of energy is astounding," Alderman said. Making the new item requires much more energy than it would to drive to the thrift store and buy a used jacket.

Everything that is made uses materials that ultimately come from the earth, whether it's iron or cotton. "It all starts with something the earth generated," Alderman said. A lot of those materials are renewable if they are created in a sustainable way but a lot are finite. People can argue about whether there are 10 or 15 years of oil left, but they agree the quantity is finite and "the more we use, the less there is to use," Alderman said. The same is true with other raw materials. Some businesses are pulling metals like copper and gold from discarded electronics, and are reclaiming a higher percentage than a well-operated mine could extract out of a ton of earth, he said.

Alderman's students' are working on a project to consolidate local soap producers and are campaigning to have everyone in Manchester's millyard use local soap. "The foundation of a local economy is the products we use on a daily basis — our consumables," Alderman said.

"Food is the big one," he said. Soap is another consumable, and sourcing it locally cuts down on transportation costs and energy use, he said. Reducing the amount of energy we use is "really where it's at," because we probably can't find a way to replace the amount of energy we use now with renewable sources, he said.

Selling your stuff

call, decided to ask for help. I congratulate them for making the call, and help them shepherd them through that change," West said.



The advertisement features the Saab logo at the top. Below it, the text reads "Saab Certified Pre-Owned". The main benefits listed are "6-Year/100,000-Mile Warranty*", "117-Plus Point Inspection", and "Full 24-Hour Roadside Assistance". There is an image of three Saab cars. At the bottom, there are three links: "» Locate dealer", "» Locate vehicle", and "» Current offers". A small disclaimer at the very bottom states: "*Whichever comes first from the original in-service date. See dealer for details."

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There are various ways to turn your things into cash. You could hold a yard sale, which can be especially effective if you and several neighbors schedule yard sales at the same time and get the word out. If you don't have a yard, there are other options.

Nelson sold the ride-on lawnmower she no longer needed through a classified ad. You could use Craigslist.org or other Web sites with "for sale" listings if you want to post pictures. You could try your local pawn shop or a flea market. You might want to look for an antique dealer, auctioneer or jewelry appraiser.

Or your local consignment store could be what you need for furnishings, decorative items or even clothing. Some area stores offer about 65 percent of the item's revenue to the seller. Generally, you need to make an appointment. Usually, the item is marked down after a certain period, and some stores limit how long they will stock something for you. If it doesn't sell, you can pick it up or, in some cases, ask the store to donate it. Some stores work with movers who will pick up your items. Many consignment stores can help you liquidate the contents of an entire home. Here are a few places:

- The Consignment Gallery has stores at 74 Route 101A in Amherst (673-4114) and 294 South River Road in Bedford (668-4114). Make an appointment to sell. They need to see photos of objects (especially the big ones) before you bring them to make sure they have a market for them. See www.consignmentgallery.com for details. They take furniture and decorative items, but no clothing, exercise equipment or electronics.
- Twice as Nice Amherst Consignment at 131 Route 101A in Amherst (886-0866) takes appointments to sell "more upscale items." They stock household goods and a large selection of jewelry. Owner Heather Bodholdt said she works with realtors who recommend Twice as Nice to clients emptying houses. Bodholdt said she's seen an increase in both selling and shopping at consignment due to the economy.
- The Antique Warehouse at 352 Amherst St. in Nashua (www.nhantiquewarehouse.com, 882-1328) offers several options to sell antiques and new items (but no appliances), from renting a booth, to enlisting Antique Warehouse to liquidate an estate by auction, home sale or consignment. They buy outright, consign and have options for pick-up.
- OPUS at 194 South Main St., in Manchester, 645-6787, is unique in that it buys and sells women's clothing and accessories. The owners aren't looking for knickknacks. They do want unique older furniture, glassware, artwork, frames, linens, pottery, antique jewelry and vintage clothing. They try to educate the public and local contractors on what to salvage in terms of things like lighting and chandeliers. OPUS also works with people consigning entire estates. Frequently OPUS is called when someone needs to move to an assisted-living facility and downsize substantially. In other instances, a couple about to combine homes might call, or someone moving out of the country who needs to sell everything. See www.opusnh.com for policies. Inventory moves pretty quickly. "We price it to sell," Moser said. "Honestly, people come in here every week ... in this kind of business, we may never see the same thing again," she said.
- A Metamorphosis in Consignment II at 710 Somerville St. in Manchester (622-6244?), www.ametamorphosisinconsignment.com is mainly looking for furnishings, antiques and jewelry.
- Exchange Boutique at 819 Second St. in Manchester, 647-5377, is accepting spring items.
- If it's kids' stuff you need to sell, try Mother & Child Clothing and Gifts, LLC at 650 Amherst St., Nashua, (www.mothersays.com, 886-6727). Read their consignment rules online, and always call before you drop off. They only take 30 items from a seller at a time.
- Meet Me at Eliza's, at 950 Elm St. in Manchester is the local place to go to consign clothes. Call 644-4999 for an appointment. You can bring in up to 25 items per appointment, and they prefer women's and children's

clothing that is less than two years old, and on hangers. They are taking spring and summer fashions now, which they will stock for 60 days. They price the items, and you get 40 percent of the take. It's open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Mondays through Fridays, until 8 p.m. Thursday, and from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays. (Random tip: to buy or sell designer clothing that is two years old or less, see www.seconddtimearound.net. There are Second Time Around stores in Boston and at 130 Congress St. in Portsmouth, 433-0200.)

Selling books

Books are awesome. It's easy to accumulate a lot of them. Shelves of books say to your guests, "Look, I'm wicked smart. I read. Or at least intend to read." But there might come a time when you need to make room for more books or can't fit your collection into your latest abode.

- Lee's Spot at 917 Elm St. in Manchester (669-8534) is open from 9:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Monday through Saturday, and will buy a book if it is something they can use.
- Annie's Book Stops (www.anniesbooks.com) at 264 Mammoth Road in Manchester (622-5526), 132 Loudon Road in Concord (224-8050) and 493 Amherst St. in Nashua (882-9178) will only take books to trade, and only paperbacks.
- The Book Cellar owns a retail store at 34 Northwest Blvd in Nashua, (881-5570, www.bookcellaronline.com) and a warehouse in downtown Nashua (880-6400). They pay cash for newer college textbooks, but other books can be traded for store credit or donated. Call or check the Web site for details.
- The Milford Toadstool Bookshop doesn't buy used books, but the Peterborough Toadstool store, at 12 Depot Square (924-3543, www.toadbooks.com) is always looking for good nonfiction. Think how-to books like those on gardening, cooking, knitting or quilting, or art books, military history or local history. Don't bother driving over if you are trying to unload bestseller fiction such as Stephen King titles or anything that was on an Oprah list.
- The Second Run Bookstore in Portsmouth (7 Commercial Alley, 431-2480) buys used books, although the owners are only offering store credit at least through May. They look for fiction and history titles, but they don't stock books that are quickly dated, like computer, business or travel guides. You can use Second Run store credit toward purchases of new books at River Run Bookstore, 20 Congress St. in Portsmouth (www.riverrunbookstore.com, 431-2100).
- Call Baldface Books at 488 Central Ave., Dover (749-2300), before heading over, because they will only buy titles they know they can sell.
- Try college bookstores. Saint Anselm College in Manchester (624-4790) and Daniel Webster College (577-6553) will buy books any day they are open, while others like the community colleges, UNH Manchester, and Rivier College (888-4145) have specific buy-back days. The Durham Book Exchange, at 36 Main St. in Durham, buys current-edition textbooks (www.durhambook.com, 868-1297).
- The online way: You can list your unwanted books on Amazon.com, Half.com, eBay.com or another book site. On Amazon.com, you can choose to list a price, or put it on auction. This isn't a fast process; you have to wait for someone to buy or bid, and then ship the item by the appointed time so no one rates you as a crappy seller. You can use media mail for reduced shipping cost, but that can still cut into profit and eat up your time. You'll need access to a printer to print shipping labels, plus some kind of packing material that's light but protective yet cheap or free. Amazon is also offering a service in which you ship your box of books to Amazon and they handle the routing.

Selling CDS, DVDs, and video games

You can go the online way to sell your CDs, DVDs or video games as well, with Amazon.com or Half.com, or

even sell them locally using Craigslist.org, (books too, for that, probably). One place to dig for advice on this and other matters is lifehacker.com, where users also recommended lala.com and secondspin.com. As with real stores, you can find sites that offer trade or credit for books, CDs, etc.

- You can get \$1 to \$2 for CDs at Pitchfork Records, 2 North Main St. in Concord (224-6700). Store credit might be different. You can sell vinyl there, but you usually won't get much and they are only looking for rock, blues and folk from 1958 on in vinyl.
- The Newbury Comics stores at 777 South Willow St. in Manchester (624-2842) and 293 DW Highway in Nashua (888-0720) also buy CDS, DVDS or video games, if you bring in their cases and liner notes and a valid state ID. They generally just offer cash, and what they pay varies widely. Newbury Comics will only buy pristine video games (www.newburycomics.com).
- Bull Moose Music? at 82 Congress St. in Portsmouth (422-9525, www.bullmoose.com), will buy your CDs, DVDs or video games. Bring in the disc in good playing condition with the case and artwork. They also want to see your state ID. They pay from 5 cents (for albums they already have several copies of) to \$6. You can take store credit or cash; if you choose cash, you'll be paid 25 percent less.
- Music Connection at 1711 South Willow St. in Manchester (644-0199) will offer \$3 store credit for CDs and \$1 for most records.

Online auction

Selling your found collectibles in online auctions is another route. But again, you need access to a printer, and time to pack and ship. You could set up your own postage meter and packing materials, if you are planning to sell a lot online.

There are bricks-and-mortar stores that will do all that for you if you don't have the time.

Iziah Gile manages iSold It at 2 Cellu Dr. in Nashua (879-9530, service.nh0260@i-soldit.com). Bring something you want to sell. The staff researches to find out what it's worth on eBay. If it's worth more than \$30, leave it at iSold It, and they'll take care of photos, eBay listing and shipping. They usually use a standard seven-day auction, but the process takes three to six weeks, from processing the posting, to confirming that the customer received the item and is satisfied. iSold It then sends the seller a check. If your object doesn't sell, pick it up or ask iSold It to donate it to charity. There's a \$5 fee to relist. iSold It takes 30 percent commission plus eBay fees, so something that sells at \$30 might net you \$18, Gile said. However, avoiding the packing and shipping hassle is "one of the biggest reasons people come here," Gile said.

iSold It is a franchise. "We're the number-one seller on eBay. We have that leverage," Gile said.

The Auction Lodge at 20 Lowell Road in Hudson offers a similar eBay service. See www.auctionlodge.com or call 882-9022.

You might also have friends or family who are avid eBay sellers and might do your selling for a fee.

Giving stuff away

There are lots of places to send your stuff where it will raise money for a good cause or help someone in need. Get out the paper Google (phone book) and look for thrift stores. Also, look for human service agencies or religious organizations that work with immigrants; refugees; fire, flood or other disaster victims; people transitioning from shelters to permanent housing, or low-income people. You might find nonprofits looking for office furniture, youth programs seeking books — there

are all kinds of places that would much prefer free used things to buying new (or can only afford free.)

But don't just dump and run. Call and find out the wish list. Often, you can get some kind of receipt to deduct the donation from your taxes.

West keeps a list of local places looking for certain kinds of donations, and can recommend errand services for clients with no time to drop them off.

You may know friends, family, coworkers or they may know people who could use some of the things you can't. Perhaps your new neighbor is coming from an apartment and would love to adopt your old rakes and snow shovels. Check with your place of worship, if you have one, for ideas. You could simply post a list there, or at work, of things you don't need.

The Nashua landfill has a very popular swap shop, where you can bring usable items if you have a landfill permit. Manchester and Concord do not have swap shops.

You could join a local Freecycle group online. "It's all about reuse and keeping good stuff out of landfills," according to www.freecycle.org. There are about 5 million members around the world and active New Hampshire groups. There are rules and etiquette to abide by, but basically once you are approved to join the group, you can send out e-mails about items you have to offer. The concept is kind of like putting things on the side of the road with a sign that says "free," but it's more organized and the stuff won't get rained on.

Freecycle can prevent some of the major hurdles people can run into when getting rid of stuff — figuring out how to move things if they don't have the manpower or a large vehicle. One way is to tell friends, "You can have this couch if you can just get it out of my house." You may also be able to arrange for a charity to pick up your donation. (Consider donating gas money, too.)

If the big thing taking up space is a broken car, there's no shortage of charities that will remove the thing and provide you with a tax deduction. You can also try scrap or salvage yards or auto recyclers. Some will pay for metals or haul away your problem vehicle.

You might find some other cause to support. For instance, there's a town-wide yard sale planned for Saturday, June 21, in New Boston to benefit the Piscataquog Land Conservancy. E-mail plc@plcnh.org or call 487-3331.

Giving books away? Check with your local library — some have "friends of the library" organizations that hold used-book sales to raise money for library programs. Maybe you know teachers looking to build up their classroom libraries. Check with schools, shelters or local groups that collect books for clients or students.

Keep your eyes open on your daily errands. Hannaford at Coliseum Avenue in Nashua, for example, takes book donations. The books are sold for 50 cents to \$2, and the revenue is donated to a different charity each month. Combining donation drop-offs with regular errands can make the stuff-purge a little easier. Keep your eyes peeled also for clothing donation drop boxes, such as Planet Aid drop boxes (www.planetaid.org). Those are often sited near grocery stores.

The Nashua Public Library works with www.betterworld.com. Their blog (which recently had an entry about clutter which conveniently lists several books about de-cluttering at blogs.nashualibrary.org/reference/)

also mentions that www.gotbooks.com has book donation bins at Nashua's landfill. Other locations are listed at the Web site.

Still have a gown in your closet that needs a new home? See www.thecinderellaprojectofnh.org for drop-off places for dry-cleaned gowns in new or almost new condition. The project gets the dresses to students attending proms, school formals or graduations. Print a donor form online and drop off at Manchester's YWCA (72 Concord St.) or participating salons. See the Web site or call 210-1415.

If you have office-appropriate clothing you don't need that's in good shape, in fashion and in season, cleaned, pressed and on hangers, call Dress for Success at 111 South Main St. in Concord (224-8683, www.dressforsuccess.org) to arrange to drop off.

Found 15 years' worth of eyeglasses? Contact your local Lions Club. The Lions Recycle for Sight program helps children and adults around the world "experience corrected vision." See www.lionsclubs.org "Vision Programs."

Old cell phones? Check www.cellphonesforsoldiers.com for local drop-off points. Collected cell phones are sold to buy prepaid phone card minutes for soldiers. Return phones to Verizon Wireless stores for HopeLine. Verizon refurbishes or recycles them and donates phones and airtime to victims of domestic violence. See www.verizonwireless.com/hopeline. Look for more cell phone drop-off points at www.recellular.com/recycling.

If you are dropping at the Salvation Army thrift store at 217 West Hollis St. in Nashua, put clothing into a plastic bag, tied at the top, and put the bag in one of the bins outside the building. Anything other than furniture goes to the opening next to the red bins or the trailer, if it's open. Donate during store hours if you want a receipt for your tax records. They don't take computer components, toys, stuffed animals or exercise equipment. Call 880-0271.

The Family Outfitters thrift store at 349 Second St. in Manchester takes donations of furniture, housewares and clothing between 11 a.m. and 4 p.m. Monday through Saturday. Call 641-6691 to arrange for pick-up. See www.familyoutfitters.org for details on what to bring or not bring.

There are Goodwill stores at the Appletree Mall in Londonderry (437-3469), Granite State Marketplace in Hooksett (623-6141) and 204 Loudon Road in Concord, (226-4448). See www.ginne.org for what they can accept.

Local soup kitchens, shelters, religious organizations and health centers often collect clothing or household item donations. West also recommends Marguerite's Place, the Boys & Girls Clubs and the Upper Room.

Trashing or recycling

You will probably find stuff that no one will buy or even take as a donation. You may even have to pay to get rid of things.

Londonderry residents can call the town to request pick-up of bulky objects that need to be trashed.

"In Manchester, it's a lot harder to do," Nelson said. She's seen neighbors put items on the side of the road, hoping someone will take them, which can be an issue if the weather is bad. "You have to plan a little bit more," she said.

Start by trying to take things back where you got them: That giant ball of plastic shopping bags in the pantry — most grocery stores have a bin for them although most towns won't recycle them. (Help keep your clutter down with reusable shopping bags, which cost about \$1 or \$1.50. They are also useful to haul donations around.) Many dry cleaners take hangers back. Some big box stores are starting programs to recycle electronics, and some hardware stores will take expired fluorescent lights, which contain mercury.

Dennis Provencher is the foreman at Manchester's "Drop Off" facility. It offers household hazardous waste collection for residents on the second Saturdays of May and October, from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Last October, 500 vehicles dropped off hazardous items. The service is funded by the city and state and is "costly," which is why it happens only twice per year.

If you put something hazardous in regular trash and someone is hurt, you can be held liable. "I just had someone throw away acid in one of our driver's cans ... I sent three guys to the hospital," Provencher said.

Materials classified as hazardous are by definition corrosive, toxic or reactive, said Minda Shaheen of the Nashua Regional Planning Commission. Some of the materials, if they end up in landfills, can react with other materials to cause fires and explosions. Most landfill liners can't withstand corrosives, which can cause leakage into groundwater.

If you live in or near Nashua, look to the NRPC for dates, times and locations of household hazardous waste collection. It can cost about \$15,000 just to get the vendor to show up, Shaheen said. There are also qualified chemists and disposal costs. Communities couldn't cover the cost alone, so NRPC organizes the collections, at which they also take electronics ("e-waste"). Residents of Amherst, Brookline, Hollis, Hudson, Litchfield, Merrimack, Milford, Mont Vernon, Nashua, Pelham and Windham can bring their hazardous wastes for a \$10 fee. There are four events left this year: June 5, Aug. 2, Oct. 4 and Nov. 1, all in Nashua.

Bringing hazardous materials like drain cleaner, lithium batteries, pool chemicals and pesticides to the hazardous waste collection is a health and safety issue. Basically, things you wouldn't want to combine in your garage, you wouldn't want combining in a landfill, Shaheen said. There's a list of accepted and unaccepted items, plus a FAQ at www.nashuarpc.org. People from other towns can bring waste but are asked to pay the average disposal cost per vehicle, which is about \$82. The collection days are funded in part through state grant money and municipal tax assessment.

"Plan ahead," Shaheen said. It's hard to get rid of hazardous stuff in the winter, mainly because the liquids don't pour well in the cold.

Another option is to use up your hazardous items. You can throw out the container in regular trash if it's empty. Shaheen also recommends sharing with neighbors, or planning to buy products like fertilizer with neighbors so everything is used up. Non-hazardous cleaning and yard solutions are listed at www.nashuarpc.org.

There are fees to recycle electronics, and it is now illegal to put them in landfills. (The European Union has actually banned use of heavy metals in electronics and other ingredients that are dangerous for landfills). Disposal will cost you between \$5 and \$20 at NRPC collections.

The Rechargeable Battery Recycling Corporation

(www.rbrc.org) accepts cell phones and rechargeable batteries, which are refurbished into new products.

The Manchester drop-off takes "everything and anything," from used car oil to batteries, to recyclables, any time of year, except for hazardous waste. You can dispose of remodeling waste there for 75 cents a pound. Call 624-6504 if you need furniture or bulky items picked up. Call the Highway Department for appliance pick-up, which will cost \$20 to \$25. A resident permit for the drop-off facility at 500 Dunbarton Road costs \$5 per year. It's open from 7:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. weekdays, and from 7 to 11:30 a.m. on first and third Saturdays monthly. It's packed on the open Saturdays, but the city has proposed keeping the facility closed on weekends to deal with budget constraints. Currently, Manchester is not charging to recycle electronics, but they need to be dropped off. Waiving the fee was part of an attempt to prevent people from leaving electronics curbside.

Southern New Hampshire Planning Commission organized household hazardous waste days last year, but they were not well-attended so none have been scheduled this year.

Concord normally holds a household hazardous waste day in the fall, said Pat Winn, Concord's solid waste programs manager. Residents can bring fluorescent bulbs and thermostats containing mercury to the transfer station, at 77 Old Turnpike Road, during operating hours, as well as auto leftovers, like car batteries, anti-freeze, tires and engine oil. Concord sends trash to a trash-to-energy incinerator. Various items like metals and construction debris, carpet, electronics, bulky items or appliances won't be picked up curbside; residents have to take them to the transfer station and pay by ton or pound. Concord has a yard waste composting program that allows residents unlimited yard waste pick-up for five weeks, ending May 23. After that, the city allows only five bags of trash per household per week, yard waste included, at curbside. The Concord transfer station is closed Tuesdays and Sundays. Call 224-0890.

Nashua charges \$25 to pick up appliances and requires residents to call 589-3410 to schedule pick-up of bulky items a week ahead. The city generally won't pick up more than the city-issued cart will hold, curbside. That means residents might have to get a landfill permit and haul the results of their stuff-purge to the landfill at 840 West Hollis St. It's open daily from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., and Saturday from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. See www.gonashua.com for all the details. And don't forget about the awesome swap shop.

In conclusion, don't finish a basement clean-out midnight Saturday before you move. You may have a really hard time dumping the trash.

Speaking of trashing stuff, West offered some advice on what kinds of papers people should hold onto. If you've been an honest taxpayer and filed accurate returns, the IRS recommends keeping the backup papers and forms for seven years, West said. But be careful if you sold stock — that can be important.

Regarding saving receipts, West said you can usually get rid of whatever you wouldn't need if you got audited tomorrow. If you have a credit card statement, or Quicken or Quickbooks — some system to prove everything you put on your tax return — you are probably OK. Check irs.gov for guidelines. Elder law attorneys, however, recommend keeping everything. There aren't hard and fast rules, West said. One idea for people moving into assisted living is to have a son or daughter scan relevant papers so parents can have digital files, rather than store decades of papers in the new place. You could also ask your accountant about this.

Storing your stuff

Moving to a bigger place eventually? Your kayak doesn't fit in your apartment?

If you want to rent a storage unit, ask friends and family for recommendations (or horror stories). You want to be able to trust the company, especially if you won't be living near the unit. There are conditioned indoor spaces and unconditioned outdoor ones, which are kind of like glorified sheds. A benefit to an outdoor unit is that you can drive up to your door to unload.

Some storage companies have a moving service affiliated with them, which is useful if you move and need the contents of your unit delivered.

If you use outdoor storage, make sure anything that could retain moisture is dry and sealed in plastic — probably a good idea for indoor units, too. Plastic storage tubs are good (but be aware of vent holes — you might want to bag items inside, too). Put those in first to protect anything stacked on top from moisture on the floor. Don't put items in an outdoor unit that can't withstand extreme heat or cold. Ask staff for other tips. Inventory what you put in the unit and investigate insurance options. Your inventory list will come in handy if you need to make a claim.

Also, arrange for automatic payment. It seems these places don't take kindly to late rent, and have been known to auction people's stuff.



The advertisement features the Saab logo at the top center. Below it, the text reads "Saab Certified Pre-Owned". Underneath that, it lists "6-Year/100,000-Mile Warranty*", "117-Plus Point Inspection", and "Full 24-Hour Roadside Assistance". The central image shows three Saab cars: a silver sedan, a smaller silver car, and a silver SUV. At the bottom, there are three navigation links: "» Locate dealer", "» Locate vehicle", and "» Current offers". A small footnote at the very bottom states: "*Whichever comes first from the original in-service date. See dealer for details."