

HOLD THE MAIL

The average American household receives more than 70 pounds of advertising mail each year. Although nearly all mail can be recycled, producing mail and delivering it to households takes natural resources and creates pollution. There are many ways to reduce the amount of junk mail you receive. This activity combines actions to reduce junk mail with creative projects to raise awareness of the issue.

Outcome

Participants will take steps to reduce the amount of unwanted mail they receive.

Audience

Youth (ages 5+) for art project, adults for reduction challenge

Time

Project can be started several weeks in advance. Allow 30 - 60 minutes or longer to create junk mail art or trees.

Concepts

- Most households receive a lot of unwanted mail.
- There are relatively simple steps you can take to reduce the amount of unwanted mail you receive.

Supplies

- Junk mail collected by participants for several weeks.
- Supplies to turn junk mail into 2-D or 3-D art, such as scissors, glue, large pieces of paper or cardboard, etc.
- Handout: Hold the Mail



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Preparation

- Ask participants to collect and bring in unwanted mail for a few weeks. Have participants remove personal information (name, address).
- Ask participants about the unwanted, or “junk,” mail they receive. How much do they get? Have they tried to get their name off of mailing lists in the past?
- Order or download a free Hold the Mail brochure for participants. Order online at www.hennepin.us/literatureorderform.

Procedure

Junk mail reduction challenge

- Have participants count, weigh and/or observe how much junk mail they receive in a specified time period (one or two weeks would work well).
- Review the Hold the Mail brochure with participants and discuss steps to reduce junk mail. Have participants go online to get their name off of mailing lists, or ask participants to commit to taking these actions at home.
- After a month or two (it can take up to eight weeks to see a change in the amount of junk mail received), have participants reassess the unwanted mail they receive. What types of mail were they successful at reducing? What unwanted mail are they still receiving?

Junk mail art projects

- The goal of these art projects is to make the connection that unwanted mail is made from trees, and creating mail and paper uses a lot of energy and water, so taking steps to reduce the mail we receive will protect the environment.

- Have individuals or teams of participants make a three-dimensional “junk mail tree” or a two-dimensional “junk mail tree” mural out of the junk mail they collected. Consider choosing a theme for the art, such as ripping up your junk mail and stacking it on a post to create a pine tree. Search “junk mail art” online for inspiration. Consider incorporating messages to remind people that mail (paper) comes from trees or outlining the steps people can take to reduce the amount of mail they receive. Display the art in your program space or a public space (such as a park building or community center). Consider having a “gallery opening.” Ask participants to decide how they will educate the people who see the art about how to reduce junk mail.
- Challenge youth (and their families) to take steps to reduce junk mail at home – track how many of the steps listed in Hold the Mail youth complete or how successful they are at reducing the amount of unwanted mail they receive.

Discussion questions

- Why do businesses use direct mail (junk mail) to advertise? (One reason is it is cost-effective.)
- Why are there so many steps to reduce junk mail? (Advertisers do not use just one database or mailing list.)
- Why is it important to reduce the amount of junk mail you receive? (Reduce paper waste, reduce energy used in mailing, etc.)
- What other ways can businesses advertise products and services to adults and youth?
- How easy or challenging was it to get your name off of mailing lists?
- What did you learn that was new?
- How did people respond to the junk mail art?
- Who showed leadership or was a great team member? How did they show it?
- What do you want to learn more about?

Resources

- Handout: Hold the Mail booklet
- Minnesota Pollution Control Agency’s website for tips to reduce junk mail: www.pca.state.mn.us/index.php/living-green/living-green-citizen/reduce-reuse-recycle/too-much-junk-mail.html