

If you're interested in living a more eco-friendly lifestyle, here's something you can do that will help protect the environment *and* preserve your sanity: reduce the amount of junk mail you receive by 90 percent.

According to information from sources such as the [Center for a New American Dream](#) (CNAD)—a Maryland-based nonprofit organization that helps people consume responsibly to protect the environment, enhance quality of life, and promote social justice—reducing the amount of junk mail you receive will save energy, natural resources, landfill space, tax dollars, and a lot of your personal time. For example:

- **5.6 million tons** of catalogs and other direct mail advertisements end up in U.S. landfills annually.

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- The average American household receives unsolicited junk mail equal to **1.5 trees** every year—more than **100 million trees** for all U.S. households combined.
- **44 percent of junk mail** is thrown away unopened, but only half of all junk mail (22 percent) is recycled.
- Americans pay **\$370 million annually** to dispose of junk mail that doesn't get recycled
- On average, Americans spend **8 months opening junk mail** in the course of their lives.

Register Your Name

OK, now that you've decided to reduce the volume of junk mail you receive, how do you go about it? Start by registering with the [Mail Preference Service](#) of the Direct Marketing Association (DMA). It won't guarantee you a life free of junk mail, but it can help. DMA will list you in its database in the "Do Not Mail" category. Direct marketers are not required to check the database, but most companies that send large volumes of bulk mail do use the DMA service. They realize there is no percentage in routinely sending mail to people who don't want it and have taken action to prevent it.

Get Off the Lists

You can also go to OptOutPreScreen.com, which can enable you to remove your name from lists that mortgage, credit card and insurance companies use to mail you offers and solicitations. It's a centralized website run by the four major credit bureaus in the United States: Equifax, Experian, Innovis and TransUnion.

Most businesses check with one or more of these companies before accepting your credit card or granting you credit for a long-term purchase. They are also a huge source of names and addresses for credit card, mortgage and insurance companies that routinely send junk mail to attract new customers and solicit new business. But there's a way to fight back. The Federal Fair Credit Reporting Act requires credit bureaus to delete your name from their rented lists if you make the request.

Contact Companies That Send You Mail

If you're serious about ridding your life of as much junk mail as possible, then simply registering with these services may not leave enough space in your mailbox. In addition, you should ask all of the companies you patronize to place your name on their "do not promote" or "in-house suppress" lists.

If you do business with a company by mail, it should be on your contact list. That includes magazine publishers, any companies that send you catalogs, credit card companies, etc. It's best to make this request the first time you do business with a company, because it will prevent them from selling your name to other organizations, but you can make the request at any time.

Keep Track of Your Name

As an extra precaution, some organizations recommend that you track where companies are getting your name by using a slightly different name whenever you subscribe to a magazine or begin a new mail relationship with a company. One strategy is to give yourself fictional middle initials that match the name of the company.

If your name is Jennifer Jones and you subscribe to Vanity Fair, simply give your name as Jennifer V.F. Jones, and ask the magazine not to rent your name. If you ever receive a piece of junk mail from other companies addressed to Jennifer V.F. Jones, you'll know where they got your name.

If this all still seems a bit daunting, there are resources to help you get through it. One option is to use the [Stop the Junk Mail Kit](#) developed by the Consumer Research Institute. The website JunkBusters.com provides further guidelines for reducing junk mail and other intrusions, from unwanted e-mail (Spam) to telemarketing.

So do yourself and the environment a favor. Keep the junk mail out of your mailbox and out of the landfill.