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a zine guide to doing it
and doing it well.



dumpster diving



There was once a time when the idea of dumpster diving disgusted me. Why? Because, as a person raised with "middle-class values" with an emphasis on a solid work ethic, the act of taking and using things designated garbage implies that I must not have access to goods and services like the rest of mainstream society. There are a lot of other things that some people might imply, too: I don't have the means to produce for myself, or I have disgusting standards for what I'm willing to use or consume, or I'm too lazy to get a job that would support me (and my family) better. For others the idea of dumpster diving reinforces the shame associated with being poor. To partake in an act that's associated with poverty would reinforce a class division between them and the rest of consumer society, which would be especially difficult for those who already face the weight of other social divisions like race, sexual orientation, and gender identity. The act of dumpstering could also be seen as dangerous, and for those who are socialized to not go out at night in solitary places like alleyways or warehouse districts, this is not only taboo, but you could be raped or killed, or both! Like, there's never been a Take Back The Night event organized from dumpster to dumpster. Also, those who fear for their legal status, a trip to the dumpster could mean a run-in with the police, which could result in a trip to jail, or worse.

But for those of us with the *privilege* to either ignore the realities of these issues, or to face the reality of these issues, dumpster diving feeds us, supplements us, sustains us, and can be damn fun. It's one of many ways to not contribute to the market economy, albeit dumpster divers are still reliant on capitalist excess - if the products weren't being produced and sold and manufactured beyond the point that we're able to consume, they wouldn't be thrown away as old 'junk' and 'expired' food. But divers still will often find themselves dependent on the wasteful nature of capitalism by being reliant on products that come from the sweat and labor of workers and at the expense of the environment. Dumpstering is a way of reducing your impact on the environment, but it is not a practice that works to directly engender a sustainable world. THAT is a topic for another zine.

"Eww, food!?" Yes, dumpster diving for food is safe and not as disgusting as one might think (if you're smart about it, that is). Many stores will throw away food on the day that it reaches its expiration date (which is a fairly arbitrary date - sometimes it expires sooner, but usually it's later), and often grocery stores will have to throw away large quantities of produce upon getting a newer, fresher shipment. Sometimes a single part of a larger package is damaged or defective, and rather than selling the individual parts, the whole thing gets thrown out. There are distribution plants that regularly mess up packaging, and you can't sell something perfectly good if the packaging is a little off. Right!?

Simply existing within a dumpster doesn't make something automatically filthy. Plus, even if it is filthy, you can always (and always should) clean it off. A dumpster in reality is probably more clean and sanitary than a dollar bill, or a door handle to a restaurant bathroom.

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More on Dumpster Diving:

"My Daily Dives in the Dumpster" by Lars Eighner is perhaps one of the best narrative stories on dumpstering, written by a man who was at the time homeless, and is insightful both in its practicality and its philosophy. It can be found online at http://www1.broward.edu/~nplakcy/docs/dumpster_diving.htm

Other guides and info:

<Freegan.info/>

<emoware.org/dumpster-diving/>

Surfing The Waste: A Musical Documentary About Dumpster Diving by Paul Afialo (<http://paullogic.com/>)

The Seattle Dumpster Diving Map:

<<http://www.wayfaring.com/maps/show/3726>>

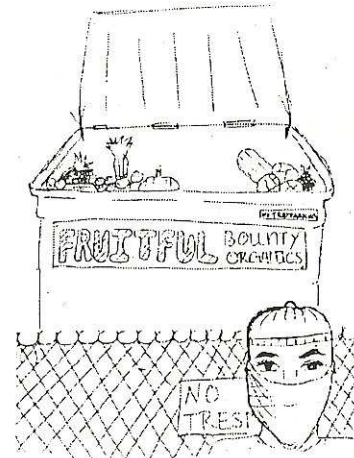
Contact us!

This was written by Benji, Kaylan, with contributions from others, and published by The SeattleDIY Collective. We welcome feedback, contributions, and all other kinds of correspondence.

Edit this document on our wiki at <http://seattlediwiki.com/Dumpster-Diving>

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art by Becky, Eli, Kaylan,
Dave (stolen from Spokeanarchy's
dating zine), stenciled dumpster from
L.A. zine

**Critique of Dumpster Diving
Privilege, class struggle, and the limitations of lifestyle
choices in creating change.**

Just as dumpster diving has its legions of adherents, so does it have a healthy set of detractors. Not everyone has the privilege to adopt this lifestyle, nor should they be expected to. Food and goods found in dumpsters are produced often at the expense of exploited labor and environment, and some see living off of these as still benefiting from oppression and not doing anything to solve it.

Critique of Dumpster Diving, from "Rethinking Crimethinc"
(<http://illvox.org/2008/01/18/rethinking-crimethinc/>)

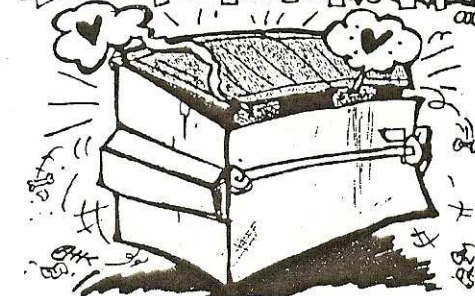
"Shoplifting, dumpster diving, quitting work are all put forward as revolutionary ways to live outside the system but amount to nothing more than a parasitic way of life which depends on capitalism without providing any real challenge. The arrogance of middle class kids (just like the hippies) supposing to change by world by roughing it as 'poor' people for a few years is captured perfectly in the quote on the back cover of their book evasion: 'Poverty, unemployment, homelessness - if you're not having fun, you're not doing it right!'"

Clearly this criticism asserts that radicals, activists, anarchists, etc should take an active part in working towards a just, equitable, and liberated world, rather than still profiting from a broken system. This idea is likewise also expressed in writings by Murray Bookchin in his critique of "lifestyle politics" in *Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism: An Unbridgeable Chasm*, suggesting that emphasizing lifestyle choices come at the expense of class struggle.

While understanding these critiques is important, we are all still left with having to care and provide for ourselves and each other. Just as dumpster diving is a privileged activity, not everyone is either ready or able to engage in a full class struggle or way of surviving completely free of capitalism. It is important that people feel like they're able to gain more control over their means of supporting themselves, and while certainly not perfect, dumpster diving can be a step in the right direction.

etiquette

**IF YOU SEE THE
DUMPSTER ROCKIN'**



**DON'T BOTHER
KNOCKIN'!**

1. First come first serve.

Dumpster divers don't own the dumpster. If someone is there when you arrive, respect their space and if there's enough room then hop in too. Don't demand a share of their spoils, however, making trades is often appreciated.

2. Take only what you need.

Many dumpsters have multiple groups of people who go to them at different times of the day or night. That means that if you clean a dumpster out of everything good, and you won't use everything, then it'll just go to waste again, whereas it could have been picked up by other dumpster divers at a later time.

3. CLEAN UP YOUR MESS!

Many stores and employees at stores don't mind dumpster divers (many employees dive themselves), but they'll start to mind if the divers make a huge mess. This is especially shitty for the employees, who are usually regular people like us, who already have shitty jobs. Let's not make their jobs shittier. Think of it this way: if you leave a mess, it's fairly likely that the business will start to lock their dumpster, which will greatly suck for you and anybody else who uses it. Leave it as nice as or nicer than you found it.

4. Don't spoil sites.

We don't want to bring unwanted attention to dumpsters. The more people you tell, the more likely it is that someone will go there and fuck things up. Use discretion when telling people about the places you frequent, and if you tell people who are new to dumpstering, be sure to tell them about good dumpster etiquette.

Tips!



1. Safety!

Go with another person! It's good to have backup, because you never know who might be there. Also, be aware of where you're putting your hand, because just like with everywhere, there are junkies who might leave their needles places, or broken glass, or rabid dogs, or zombies. You may not want to bring a large group, as it's far more conspicuous, and you may not want to attract any extra attention.

2. Escape Routes.

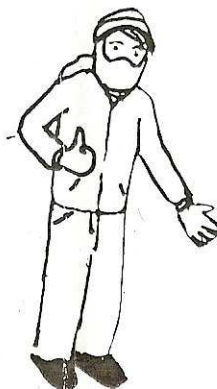
If you need go get out of there in a hurry, it's good to know the best route to take. HOWEVER, don't run if the cops show up. Dumpster diving at most is a trespassing charge, which is a misdemeanor (ie, not a big deal), but they probably won't even charge you with that. It's good to also prepare an excuse why you're there. Running is more likely to lead to a charge, potentially not only with a trespassing charge, but also with obstruction of justice.

3. Gear.

Good gear to bring is a large backpack or a bag, a flashlight/headlamp, and gloves. If you have a car, bring some crates. If you're on a bike, a rack is good. Just in case, wear clothes that you don't mind getting a little dirty, and quality solid boots if you're going into a really extreme dumpster.

4. Timing.

Usually the ideal time is late at night, well after business are closed and when there aren't many people on the streets. This is to help ensure that you don't get messed with, though there are some places where nobody thinks twice about dumpster divers and you may feel so inclined to dive at any time. If you're not into doing it late, showing up an hour after businesses close is a nice safe amount to give employees to head back home. You should also do your best to find out when dump trucks come to empty the dumpsters, and find out on what days stores get their shipments in and thus throw out excess.



5. Dig Deep.

Sometimes you'll find little dumpster jewels sitting right on top, waiting to be liberated. However, this isn't always the case, and often you'll need to put in a little elbow grease, get a little dirty, and get ready to rip some bags open. Sometimes you may need to completely remove things from the dumpster in order to get to where you need to go, but be sure to put it all back when you're done.

6. Discretion.

When diving food, be careful what you choose to take with you. Be aware of how long things have been sitting out and how warm it is outside. When it's warm things will obviously go bad much more quickly. Many avoid meats, eggs, and dairy, but for those who insist on it, research what bacteria can be killed by cooking at what temperature. Some fruits and vegetables are ok with a little mold or rot that can be cut off, but others should be avoided outright (melons, for example) because of how mold and bacteria can be spread. Some things are difficult to wash, like broccoli, leafy-greens, or cauliflower, so if it's gross then move on. If you're suspicious about why an enormous quantity of one item is in the dumpster and it's not even near the expiration date, ask an employee if the company just declared a recall of that item.

7. Locations.

Use creativity! Explore stores and distributors with return policies, stores with display models, stores with products that expire, places that throw away scraps, etc, are all good possibilities. Also a fun thing to do is pay attention to store news - ie, if a cooler breaks down at Safeway, they'll throw away things in their coolers. Factories are good places to go, because they will often throw away a whole box of something if there is a single 'defective' component. The sky is the limit!

Have fun, and play safe!

8. Gleaning!

Don't limit yourself to just jumping into dumpsters and exploring alleyways at night. Consider the possibility of getting the food before it ends up in the trash, and ASK people at stores if they have anything that is going to be thrown out that you might have. Often grocery stores and food distributors have food destined for the food bank, but there are times when it doesn't all get picked up. This tactic can also be employed following all-you-can-eat buffets, and restaurant workers will sometimes accept a routine chore like vacuuming or sweeping in exchange for left-overs.

