

As seen in the “Ask the Organizing Expert” column in the Lake Oswego Review and West Linn Tidings.

Question: Shortly after Christmas, my house looks like it was hit by a tornado. How do I corral all that post-Christmas clutter?

Christmas is coming. The excitement is building! The presents are piling high! What’s on your wish list? A plasma screen? One of those mini laptops? Did you find a Zhu Zhu pet for your daughter? If your house is anything like mine, it will transform itself from a Christmas wonderland into a heaping pile of boxes, bows, ribbons and wrappings in a matter of hours, and electronic and digital gifts seem to leave an even bigger pile in their wake. No need to let all that Christmas clutter dampen your spirits. Try these quick fixes for all the extras that come with the must-haves on your Christmas list.

Electronics Boxes – to keep or not to keep? I’m fairly certain this issue alone is responsible for 25% of all divorces. And is it my imagination, or are the opinions evenly divided along gender lines (men keep them; women toss them)? Most experts agree you should keep boxes and packaging for fragile electronics – large screen televisions and computers, for instance. They are the safest way to transport the item in a move or ship it for repair work. If you’ve got the storage space – think attic or garage loft – then keep them. On the other hand, how often do you ship or re-pack your electronics? If you simply lack the storage space, recycle the box and deal with the problem when (and if!) it happens.

Instruction Manuals – how should I organize them? Much of your new Christmas loot will come with instruction manuals. These can be safely kept in 3-ring binders, magazine butlers, or hanging files. Whichever method you choose, keep them all together, and divide the manuals by category (electronics, exercise equipment, tools, large appliances, small appliances, and toys). It’s nice to have one binder or folder called “Stays with the House” for things like kitchen appliances, garage door openers, and hot water heaters. The next owners of your home will thank you for it! BTW, there is nothing wrong with tossing all your instruction manuals in a drawer or box, so long as you can find them when you need them.

Passwords and Codes – Toys, electronics, software and video games often come with log-in information or encryption codes. These can easily get lost in that mountain of wrapping paper, so grab them when you can and safely store them in your office. When time allows, make a file for your codes and consider one for the kids, too. If you prefer an electronic solution, check out Passwords Plus (www.passwordsplus.com). You can try it for free, and it’s a great way to store log-in credentials and other secret data.

Now I Have Two – but the old one still works. That Blu-ray disc player is so new and sexy, but your DVD player has yet to go kaput. What to do with the dupe? How about your guest room or playroom? Perhaps your child’s school could use it? If not - consider selling it on the internet or at your next garage sale – electronics are always the first to go. Did you know you can recycle TVs, computer CPUs, monitors and laptops for free? Check out www.oregonmetro.gov. And old cell phones can be sent to www.cellphonesforsoldiers.com.

Christmas morning is oh, so splendid, but it can be a bit overwhelming, too, especially if you’re someone who appreciates a little order. Let the wrapping paper fly! But keep in mind some of these simple solutions, and your holiday celebration will be a whirlwind of fun and tidy, too. Here’s wishing you a fabulous Christmas Day!

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