

Consumers: use caution when giving, getting gifts

With Christmas just a few days away, many of us will be searching for that perfect last-minute gift. For some of those hard-to-buy-for people on our lists, gift cards can seem like the perfect solution.

But know some tips and rules about gift cards to protect yourself and the gift recipient. Here are a few things you should know:

Under Kansas law, gift cards cannot expire for at least five years. If the gift card does not have an expiration date on it, then it is good until you redeem it, no matter how long that is.

Merchants can begin charging inactivity fees against the card's balance 12 months after the card is issued. These fees are required to be printed on the card or the packaging it comes in.

Pre-paid bank cards – the ones that are issued by a bank or credit card company, not by a specific store – can, and usually do, charge additional fees for purchasing the card, and on the balance.

Be aware that even with legal protections in place, the value of a gift card may be lost if the store goes out of business before the card is used.

When buying a gift card, try to be sure it is from a store the person will use. Make sure to buy gift cards from a reputable source – such as from the store itself. There are a number of online auction sites and gift card dealers, which offer cards at a discounted price, but you should always use caution when buying cards this way. There have been reports of many cards sold on these sites being counterfeit or otherwise not working when they are received.

Be sure to include the original receipts with the



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• Attorney General

card. This will help the recipient replace the card if it is lost or stolen.

If you are the recipient of a card, you should use the card as soon as you can to avoid expiration dates, inactivity fees or the possibility the card gets lost. Many retailers will allow you to register your cards online, which will protect your balance and help you replace the card if it is lost or stolen.

If you happen to receive a card for a place you do not shop, it is unlikely that the retailer will let you exchange your card for cash. However, there are websites that allow you to sell or exchange your gift cards. Again, use caution when dealing with these online sites to be sure you don't become a victim of fraud. You can also donate your unwanted gift cards to a local charity, especially cards for grocery, clothing or department stores.

For more consumer tips or to file a complaint, visit our website at www.ksag.org or give us a call at (800) 432-2310.

Best wishes for a happy holiday season!

Hauling the recycling



JUDY ROGERS/Golden Plains School District
Juniors Morgan Walz (left) and Angela Ritter took their turn at dumping the recycling boxes at Golden Plains High School. The National Honor Society is recycling paper as one of its community service projects. The girls hauled the materials to the recycling trailer in Rexford.

Let it snow, let it snow; federal agency urges safety in winter

KANSAS CITY, Mo. – With the official arrival of winter, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency asks individuals, families and organizations to prepare themselves for the severe cold and storms that have already begun to affect the region.

"By preparing, individuals, families and businesses increase their chances of not only surviving, but quickly recovering from an emergency," said Beth Freeman, Regional Administrator for the agency's Region VII. "Winterizing your home, car and/or business today and staying informed, could make all the difference tomorrow."

All year round, the agency is in contact

and partnering with local, state, tribal and federal government entities; the private sector; not-for-profit, voluntary and other organizations, to protect the public's health and safety and to meet immediate needs. The agency has supplies of emergency commodities across the United States should they be needed to support state and local emergency response operations.

"No matter how much FEMA or its partners do however, the most important emergency managers are always going to be individuals. People helping themselves and neighbors helping neighbors are at the heart of American resiliency," said Freeman.

Winter weather preparedness and safety tips:

- When inclement weather threatens follow the instructions of state and local officials and listen to local radio or television stations for updated emergency information.

- As much as possible, stay indoors and avoid traveling by car. If you must travel, be sure to have an emergency supply kit in the trunk of your car and at least a half of a tank of gas. The agency urges families to maintain an emergency supply kit both at home and in the car to help prepare for winter power outages and icy or impassable roads.

- An emergency supply kit should include a three-day supply of food and

water, a battery-powered or hand-crank radio and extra flashlights and batteries. Thoroughly check and update your family's emergency supply kit and add the following supplies in preparation for winter weather: rock salt to melt ice on walkways; sand to improve traction; snow shovels and other snow removal equipment; and adequate clothing and blankets to help keep you warm.

- Ensure your family preparedness plan and contacts are up to date and exercise your plan. Learn about the emergency plans that have been established in your area by your state and local government, and ensure your home and car are prepared for the winter weather.

- Finally, everyone should get familiar

with the terms that are used to identify a winter storm hazard and have a family discussion about what to do if a winter storm watch or warning is issued. Terms used to describe a winter storm hazard include the following: freezing rain creates a coating of ice on roads and walkways; sleet is rain that turns to ice pellets before reaching the ground. Sleet also causes roads to freeze and become slippery. A Winter Weather Advisory means cold, ice and snow are expected. A Winter Storm Watch means severe weather such as heavy snow or ice is possible in the next day or two. A Winter Storm Warning means severe winter conditions have begun or will begin very soon.

Redcedar encroachment poses problems for landowners, cattle producers

MANHATTAN – They're everywhere – those Eastern redcedar trees that dot much of the Kansas landscape. And they pose a problem for many landowners.

"Eastern redcedar encroachment is an increasing problem in rangelands in the eastern two-thirds of Kansas," said Carol Blocksome, range management specialist with K-State Research and Extension. "The Kansas Forest Service estimates that there was a 23,000 percent increase in redcedar volume in Kansas between 1965 and 2005. That means an undesirable conversion of rangeland to forest, which negatively impacts prairie wildlife habitat and a decreased amount of available forage for livestock."

Blocksome and several colleagues developed a redcedar calculator that allows a cattle producer to roughly determine the amount of forage lost to redcedar encroachment and the related reduction in carrying capacity of a paddock. The calculator can be found online at <http://ksfire.org/p.aspx?tabid=15> under "Education/Reasons for Burning."

The tool estimates the amount and percent of forage lost due to redcedar encroachment, and also estimates the number of cow-calf

pairs that could be supported if those trees were eliminated.

Redcedar is primarily controlled by burning small trees (less than 3 feet in height) and by mechanical means for areas with larger trees, dense stands without a grass understory, or where fire poses a safety hazard, the agronomist said. By allowing producers to calculate forage losses, the costs of redcedar control can be considered in

conjunction with the potential for positive financial returns due to increased livestock production.

The calculator was based on measurements taken in the tall-grass prairie. It has not been evaluated for mid-grass or short-grass rangelands.

Producers often work with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to gather information that needs to be entered

into the online tool, Blocksome said.

"Controlling redcedar, and thereby increasing forage production, can have a positive economic impact for producers by allowing them to stock more livestock on the same paddock," she said.

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