



RECYCLING ADVOCATES

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WWW.RECYCLINGADVOCATES.ORG

Portland Composts! **Curbside composting is here for Portland**

by Rhett Lawrence



Unless you don't live in Portland, or if you DO live under a rock, you probably are aware that big changes are coming to Portland's curbside waste collection. Starting in November, Portland residents (at least those that live in single-family homes or buildings with four or fewer units) will now be able to place all their food scraps, along with yard debris, into their green roll carts.

One exciting piece of news is that, in addition to the usual carrot peelings and coffee grounds that typically go into household compost bins, Portlanders will now be able to include meat, bones, dairy, tea bags, paper napkins, and pizza boxes in their compost, among many other items. No "compostable" cups or carryout containers, paper plates, or

doggie doo, however. (See the city's website below for a full list of what goes in and what stays out.)

Portland residents' curbside collection of this compostable waste will now happen weekly, as opposed to the every-other-weekly yard waste pickup we've previously had. And what's turning out to be the most controversial component of the new collection system is that garbage will now be picked up only every other week. The blue roll carts for other recycling and the yellow bins for glass will continue to be picked up every week.

City officials maintain that, for most of us, the costs of our waste service will remain about the same since weekly garbage collection is being swapped out for weekly compost collections. They also note that since food scraps account for about 30,000 tons of garbage in Portland every year, diverting this waste from the garbage will help the city reach its goal of a 75% recycling rate.

Obviously, this new system will be something of a change for most of us and it may take some getting-used-to. The City notes that the system ran relatively smoothly for the 2,000 households that took part in the pilot program in certain Portland neighborhoods over the last year, with 87% of those households reporting that they were satisfied with the service.



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Portland Joins the Plastic Bag Ban Movement

by Kris Olson

Portland can thank Mayor Sam Adams, Recycling Advocates, and other local environmental supporters for passing a city-wide single-use plastic bag ban on July 21, 2011. This ban came a month after Oregon failed in a state-wide attempt to ban single-use plastic bags. Portland's ban went into effect Oct 15, 2011, and affects only large retail stores and pharmacies within Portland city limits.

In pushing for a plastic bag ban, Portland is in good company. Approximately 40 cities nationwide have passed plastic bag ban ordinances, including cities within the counties of Los Angeles, Santa Cruz, and Kauai in CA and HI. San Francisco led the nation with a ban in 2007. Other U.S. bans have been passed and/or put into effect within the last year or two. The movement is continuing to ramp up with more and more cities taking notice and getting into discussions. Approximately 30 more cities and several counties are moving toward bans or plastic bag restrictions, including a state-wide initiative in Michigan (HB4919) that would impose a one cent plastic bag fee on retailers. Worldwide,

bans have been implemented in dozens of cities.

The Portland bag ban ordinance does not require a fee for paper bags. Other cities are imposing fees for paper bags and some heavier grade 'reusable' plastic bags. Fees range from 5 cents in Bellingham, WA, to one dollar in Brownsville, TX. Paper bags use more energy to produce and cost retailers roughly four cents more per bag than the thin plastic. Reusable bags purchased by consumers are the most cost-effective option for retailers. Portland retailers technically could charge for paper bags, but it's more likely they'll raise prices on products to cover the cost.

During Portland's kick-off for the ban, 10,000 reusable bags were given away through social service networks to the low-income and elderly. Retailers have been experimenting with a variety of low-cost reusable bag options for customers. Albertsons sells reusable bags in various sizes and strengths that cost between 25 cents to \$1.99 per bag. Fred Meyer has two sizes at 89 cents and 99 cents and claims a lifetime guarantee.

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For up-to-date information on plastic bag bans check this growing list:

- Recycling Advocates bag ban tracker (www.recyclingadvocates.org/sites/default/files/docs/Plastic%20Bag%20Ban%20Chart.pdf)
- www.bagmonster.com
- www.plasticbagbanreport.com
- www.wasterecyclingnews.com
- www.chicobag.com/t-track_movement.aspx

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In Oregon, the cities of Corvallis and Eugene are discussing plastic bag bans. Newport recently voted in favor of a ban and is drafting an ordinance. The ultimate goal of Recycling Advocates and Oregon environmentalists is a statewide ban of both single-use plastic and paper bags. The Northwest Grocers Association is also in favor of a state-wide ban on both types of single-use bags. Smaller-scale ordinances are harder for local and national retailers to implement and maintain across their stores in varying counties and cities.

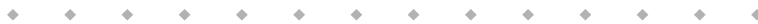
Plastic bag laws in the U.S. have stemmed from grassroots efforts and have been successful, especially in towns along protected waterways. It's interesting to note how the ordinances vary by city. Some have fees, some don't - and not all fees are equal amounts, or help those taking on the most financial burden. Some impose penalties, some don't. Cities that are just beginning bag ordinance discussions have an advantage of using these models and seeing what's working and what isn't, and then customizing for their own bylaws. For instance, cities in L.A. County must take into account the Proposition 26 'stop hidden tax' mandate, where collected fees must go to the retailer; no revenue can go to the city.

Plastic bag ordinances have been developing and

passing at a fairly good pace. But recent efforts are now running into legal roadblocks. There's actually now a group called 'Save the Plastic Bag Coalition' that is backed by the plastic industry and the American Chemistry Council. The group has filed a lawsuit in Santa Monica, California - where plastic bags for restaurant take-out food will also be banned - claiming that people's safety will be at risk when transporting hot foods.

Consumer reactions to the ban so far have been mixed. Many eco-conscious Portlanders have been using reusable bags for years. Others, now faced with change, are feeling that their choices are being limited.

Proponents of the bans obviously understand the issues around plastic bags. But because many consumers view these bans as losing both a convenience and a freedom of choice, we as advocates and concerned citizens need to continue the challenge of educating the public. The theory is that it takes 21 days to make or break a habit to make a lifestyle change. Our job now is to help folks figure out free or low-cost options for carrying their purchases, dealing with their trash and picking up pet waste. Now more than ever, our conversations need to continue, and our talking points and strategies should stay focused and in alignment. Let's keep addressing the importance of healthy decisions for the Earth and its inhabitants.



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From the RA perspective, I think it's safe to say – though I have not taken a poll of Board members – that our response is “It's about time!” This change has been a long time in coming, but it's an important step in moving the city forward on waste reduction. And I personally am very excited to finally not have to throw those pizza boxes in the garbage anymore!

Have questions? There are three easy ways to get help from the City:

1. Visit www.portlandcomposts.com to learn more and submit a comment form online.
2. Call the Curbside Hotline at 503-823-7202.
3. Send an e-mail to wasteinfo@portlandoregon.gov

Resource Recycling's 2011 National Recycling Conference

*August 17 – 18, 2011
Indianapolis, Indiana*

by Betty Patton in conjunction with Kelly Panciera and Amy Roth

Resource Recycling, Inc., publisher of Resource Recycling Magazine in Portland presented their second annual national recycling conference this summer in Indianapolis. This two day conference was full of valuable information, opportunities to analyze data and programs, and discussions of issues and challenges within our recycling needs. On a personal note, I was very sorry to have to miss this conference. However, this article contains the input of two local industry leaders who were in attendance.

For most of us, recycling is a very local program. But our program and policy ideas can come from anywhere in the world. Conferences such as this one bring together experts and beginners alike from throughout the recycling world.

Extended producer responsibility (EPR) was the opening topic. This method of material management is increasing in many industries. Oregon has an electronics recycling program, a paint collection program, and a bottle bill that are designed on an EPR model. The presenters at the conference questioned and analyzed all aspects of this policy foundation. Is EPR an effective funding model? How does this type of recovery responsibility impact retailers and grocers? What can manufacturers do to increase the return and recycling of their product or packaging? Is EPR a solid tool in approaching sustainability? One of the speakers on this topic is with Nestle Waters North America, one of

the larger bottled water companies. Their goal is to have not more than 40% of their packaging going to the landfill by 2018.

Two challenging areas for quality recovery and recycling are public events and rural communities. Solutions within both of these scenarios were discussed with case studies as foundations for presentations. Here in Oregon successful recycling has been implemented at local and regional events as well as the very large scale, multi-day Olympics trials in Eugene. In Indianapolis, their upcoming big event is the 2012 Super Bowl. Even though the game itself is a single day event, the media and others will be onsite for an extended period of time prior to game day. The program being implemented for this football event includes composting and recycling, as well as some waste prevention and reuse. Maybe we should send them the Recycling Advocates' Event Recycling Guide.

Counties and states have continuously struggled with rural recycling. New Mexico is advancing a hub and spoke recycling program that sounds compelling. For those interested in providing programs and services to rural populations, this state's actions might be one to follow.

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Amy Roth and **Kelly Panciera** of **Green Spectrum Consulting** attended the conference and brought back the following insights:

There is a definite paradigm shift happening in the recycling industry towards a larger concept of Sustainable Materials Management (SMM). Waste management has centered around the hierarchy of 3R's – reduce, reuse, recycle – and really centered on end-of-life waste management and that was the best way to manage our resources. The new reality is that recycling is part of a much bigger system that takes into consideration the life-cycle view of materials and processes. As EPA described it, materials management is concerned with inputs and outputs from/to the environment, including use of materials, energy and water, plus multiple environmental impacts, whereas waste management is concerned mainly with outputs to the environment (air, water, land) and usually only those from waste and only where the waste is managed. Waste management is only one piece of the puzzle to be considered. We need to start thinking about managing our resources further upstream, not just our waste at the end of life, and realize that waste is a resource when properly managed. As recyclers and professionals in the industry, we have a tremendous opportunity emerging before our eyes to truly influence this new landscape. We need to get on board and embrace this shift because while recycling and disposal will always have its place in the new hierarchy, what we're recycling and disposing and how we're doing it may be very different than it is today.

Locally, DEQ is developing an SMM plan (<http://www.deq.state.or.us/lq/sw/materialsmgmtplan.htm>). Additionally, the Association of Oregon Recyclers (AOR) had a lengthy discussion during their policy session at this year's annual conference on embracing materials management and positioning AOR as the materials experts within the broader field of sustainability.

Resource Recycling presented results of their annual survey of municipal recycling coordinators/managers from across the country. One thing that stood out was how many more communities have switched to single stream collection in an effort to cut costs and generate more revenue for their programs. The reason this is unsettling is that Wade Schuetzeberg, American Chung Nam Group, Inc. highlighted in his presentation in the "Where are paper markets headed" session that the quality of materials coming out of America is almost unbuyable at this point. The paper coming out of the US is so contaminated, it is practically garbage. He said his facility and virtually all the facilities in China buying US papers have tremendous problems with the quality of the commodity coming into them. Quality of materials was a problem identified by all of the speakers in this session, and echoed by others throughout the conference. They all said they would jump at the opportunity to pay top dollar for top quality, but they can't seem to find it. Sadly, many manufacturers are looking to incorporate more virgin fiber because the quality in the recycled paper coming into their plants doesn't meet their needs. So, the take away from this session and throughout the conference was that we need to take a closer look at this shift to single (and even dual) stream recycling practices. As programs look to earn more revenue, it is no longer about quantity, it is all about quality.

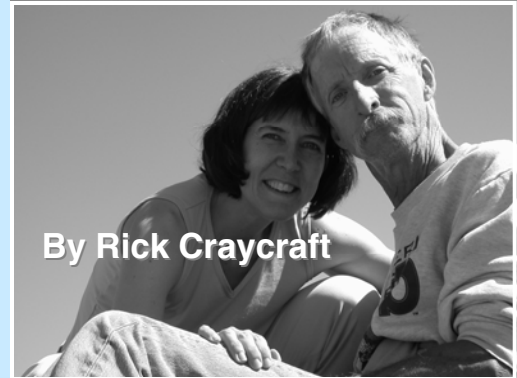
For those of us interested in national organizations and conferences that offer opportunities for broader discussion, another issue of interest was presented at this conference. Currently there are two national organizations that cover the recycling and materials management market, Recycling Organization of North America (RONA) and National Recycling Coalition (NRC). Representatives and board members from each organization met to discuss the details of coalescing into one group. There is currently no consensus, but talks are ongoing.

Sessions at the conference presented pilots and programs to improve food waste collection, aseptic packaging recycling, and glass recovery and recycling, as well as market analysis of paper and other commodities. Each of these topics is important to advancing recycling in our community. However, one of the most useful results from this conference is the opportunity to share ideas, learn from others, and network within the industry across state boundaries.

FROM THE MEMBERSHIP

The Plastics Project

In September of 2010 my wife, Jan, and I set forth to spend the next year attempting to keep new plastics from entering our lives. We continued to use any plastics we had accumulated and not recycled up to that point – storage containers, plastic bags, kitchen utensils and the like. (Understanding the consumer realities of this society and, on the basis of some arbitrary personal decisions, we made up a list of 9 parameters within which to manage the project. These can be viewed at www.funnylittleexperiment.blogspot.com.)



By Rick Craycraft

Right off we realized we were going to have to adjust our habits of consumption. We negotiated carefully with businesses like New Seasons, Zupan's, Kettleman's Bagels and others to make sure we were not violating any State Department of Health regulations or putting those businesses in jeopardy. With cooperation on their part and some creativity on ours we were able to make the transition not too jarring. As the project progressed here were some of the patterns that emerged :

- We had to pay attention ALL THE TIME. It's not so simple as “paper or plastic”. We had to remember that onus was always on us to say , “No straw, please. No lid, please.” Anticipating where plastic might seep in became a necessary skill and a great source of frustration. Even at our most diligent we got “caught”. We understood that many times we were requesting something out of the ordinary, but took a stance of “polite but firm” in our approach of fending off unwanted plastic.
- We also just plain had to give things up. I didn't realize how much I missed chips until I found myself gobbling them up from the bowls at parties and potlucks. I'm an avid cookie consumer but survived for months through kind friends making them in support of our project. Eventually I found a source for them in bulk. After a while this “deprivation” became a non-issue as we walked the aisles of stores. We never gave in to “Oh, just this once.”
- At times we had no choice. Damn those blister packs. Sometimes with tools and household goods we simply saw no option (without driving all over town to find it, another dilemma). At least I believe that we never bought anything packaged in something we couldn't supposedly recycle.
- We have to accept that what we did hardly registered. The volume of plastic produced and consumed worldwide every day dwarfed our efforts to stem the tide. However, we feel more empowered, and confident that others can take these actions too. The bag of plastics in our laundry room, destined for the Plastics Roundup (remember those?), didn't grow at all.

September 15 marked the end of our no plastics year. Now what? It didn't take us long to decide to make this practice permanent in our lives and, if possible, to continue to refine it. I don't think we could live with ourselves any other way.

ADVOCACY CALENDAR

Plastics and Our Oceans, *Portland* November 16

Hear from two Portland residents who sailed through remote oceanic areas to study plastic pollution. Nastassja Pace & Megan Ponder share their passions about plastics pollution prevention and outreach efforts to solve this problem.

RSVP to masterrecycler@portlandoregon.gov

Recycling Advocates Board Meeting November 21, 7-9 pm

Call 503-777-0909 for details.



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