



RECYCLING ADVOCATES

February 2003

Involving people in creating a sustainable future through local efforts to reduce, reuse, and recycle

Recycling Plastic Tubs

The tower of tubs on top of the refrigerator

Recently an RA member e-mailed a question about the destination of plastic tubs collected at some grocery stores' recycling stations. She had heard that most tubs are not recycled and are just disposed of in landfills. Plastics recycling is complicated due to market volatility, the various policies of haulers and sorting facilities, and increases in international transport costs. Recycling programs typically accept plastic bottles and jugs with the #1 (PET) or #2 (HDPE) on the bottom. PET bottles include plastic soda and water bottles, as well as cooking oil bottles. HDPE bottles include dish detergent bottles, shampoo bottles, and larger milk, water, and juice jugs. But what about the margarine tubs and yogurt containers that many households have stacked atop the refrigerator?

Because bottles and wide mouth containers are molded using different processes, the plastic resins used to make them have different melting points, thus mixing them to manufacture recycled products is not possible. There is only an unstable market for the lowly yogurt or margarine tub, whether it be made from #2 (HDPE) or #5 (PP) plastic. If the yogurt cup is made of #6 (PS) plastic (as many are) the market isn't there at all. The "landfill impact" of plastic tubs is negligible, as the plastics manufacturers' lobbyists like to point out.

*Plastics recovery and recycling:
Three cases*

A Recovery Site

According to John Matthews, recycling coordinator at Garten Services in Salem, the challenge in recycling plastics is in

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Recycling Advocates Proposes State Legislation

By Wayne Rifer

Statute targets e-waste in Oregon

Recycling Advocates has asked Representative Jackie Dingfelder to introduce legislation on electronics product stewardship this session. Our objective is to put Oregon ahead of the curve in the national movement to address the growing challenge of e-waste. The bill will direct specific departments to provide stakeholder input and advise the legislature on the issue of electronics waste. It also directs the DEQ to develop a timeline for an eventual ban on the disposal of e-waste in Oregon landfills.

Readers of this newsletter know that Recycling Advocates has been supporting the Western Electronic Product Stewardship Initiative (WEPSI) and the National Electronic Product Stewardship Initiative (NEPSI) for two years.

NEPSI is built on the premise that one national solution is the best approach. We agree.

But to get a national solution the voice of concern from states and localities, and the willingness to act on that concern, needs to be strengthened. This bill would add to that voice, which is also being heard from California, North Carolina, Washington, and other states. As well, Oregon can begin to get its house in order so that we take advantage of a national solution when one emerges.

The following is from our concept proposal for the bill. For the full text, please visit our web site at www.recyclingadvocates.org.

"THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that

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Become a Master Recycler

Classes start in March

Do you hate to see anything go to waste? Do you love to share knowledge with others? Do you want to make a difference in the world? If so, you may have what it takes to become a Master Recycler.

The next Oregon State University Extension Service Master Recycler course, set to begin Tuesday March 11, 2003 will meet at Sunnybrook Services Center. The popular eight-week course, which includes two field trips, provides 30 hours of instruction in topics such as waste prevention, recycling processes, alternatives to hazardous household products and composting.

The \$50 course fee includes materials. Scholarships are available. Advance registration for the spring course is required by February 27, 2003. Information and applications are available by calling OSU Extension Service Agent, Megan Cogswell, at (503) 725-2035.



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Did you know?

Currently only twenty percent of RA members receive the electronic version of their monthly newsletter. By opting for the e-mail version you help RA reduce waste associated with the printing and processing of the newsletter. To receive the e-mail version or for a sample electronic newsletter, please e-mail Jeffrey White, RA Newsletter editor, at info@recyclingadvocates.org.

Plastics, continued

the separating. The move of recycling programs to commingle materials places the burden of sorting on processors. Currently, Garten Services ships plastic bottles and containers unsorted to China via Hong Kong. There the Chinese vendor farms out the materials to smaller local shops for hand sorting. Once separated, the plastic can be sold or recycled into other products. "It's a matter of economics," added Matthews. Technology exists to sort plastics automatically, but it is expensive. Its high cost makes such processing impossible for recyclers that handle lower volumes of materials. Faced with high costs, it is economically more viable to ship materials overseas for processing.

There are very few local markets for separated plastic food tubs, Matthews noted. New technology exists for plastic lumber out of mixed plastics, which Matthews sees as a potential path to future plastics recycling in the Northwest.

A Yogurt Company's Program

One yogurt manufacturer, Stonyfield Farms, has developed a type of buy-back program. Consumers who send back clean used containers receive coupons for Stonyfield products. The company works with Recycline, a manufacturer that reprocesses the yogurt containers into toothbrushes. Stonyfield packages its yogurt in #5 containers and claims that #5 plastic impacts the environment less than #2 plastic, which some other yogurt manufacturers use. On its web site, Stonyfield makes the

following case:

"In using polypropylene (#5) packaging, Stonyfield uses significantly less plastic than we would if we made our cups with HDPE #2 plastic. One of the most beneficial characteristics of #5 plastic is that its structure allows the container to be made of thinner walls, while maintaining the same structural integrity. Our quart containers are over 30% lighter today than they were 10 years ago. By using #5 plastic instead of #2, each year we prevent the manufacture and disposal of over 100 tons of plastic, resulting in environmental savings from the decreased air emissions and resource depletion from the manufacture and distribution of the packaging."

For more information on the program, visit www.stonyfield.com/ido/EnvironmentalPackaging.shtml or <http://www.recycline.com>. The Stonyfield web site provides a lengthy discussion on their decision to use #5 containers and a link to a life cycle assessment study the company commissioned by the University of Michigan's Center for Sustainable Systems.

Grocery Store Services

Some grocers in the Portland area, such as Nature's Northwest, New Seasons Market and Lamb's Thriftway, collect #2 and #5 food tubs as a courtesy to customers. According to Mark Cockcroft, marketing director of Nature's, the returned tubs are received by haulers that accept them for recycling. The haulers take them to recyclers in Portland, unless there is no market for the materials. Store chains like Nature's deal with various hauling companies due to jurisdictional regulations. A hauling vendor for a store in Portland may not have the franchise in Beaverton. Different haulers take collected materials to different sorting and recycling facilities.

"All of our recyclers that I have talked to ensure me that they do everything possible to make sure these are recycled. That's why we still offer it," added Cockcroft. Since the market for #2 and #5 rigid plastic is so volatile, Nature's cannot guarantee that returned materials collected at their stores will be recycled. Cockcroft noted that some haulers have had to hold materials until the recycling market opened up, and, at

times, if there is not market for an extended time, the materials are landfilled. He also emphasized that the consumer can help the effort to recycle #2 and #5 tubs by returning cleaned containers and following directions at Nature's collection stations. The bottom line is that returned food tubs may or may not end up recycled. In all likelihood, they make a trip to Asia for sorting and processing.

The issue of recycling food tubs brings up questions of policy and responsibility. If there is not a clear market for the materials, what can citizens, companies and governments do to develop one? Who would pay for market development? Should consumers, the manufacturers of food tubs or the food manufacturers subsidize plastics recycling? What are the alternatives to buying food in plastic food tubs? Lori Stole, an RA board member who just returned from Germany, reports that she just observed glass yogurt containers in use there, which had a return deposit. In our dominant consumer society, there appear to be no easy answers at this time.

Editor's note: Thanks to Chiquita Rollins, an RA member, for her initial inquiry about food tubs and the information about Stonyfield Farms.

DEQ Awards Grants for Portland Area-Based Recycling Projects

Local hospitals, PSU and Free Geek receive funds

The Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) has awarded solid waste grants totaling \$60,238 for three recycling projects based in the Portland metro area.

The DEQ is supporting the City of Milwaukie, working in partnership with the Portland-based Oregon Center for Environmental Health with a grant of \$20,238 to help the Center develop a fluorescent lamp recycling program at Oregon hospitals. The participants include Legacy Health System in Portland, Asante Health System in Medford, and Good Shepherd Health System in Hermiston. The project is expected to divert at least 50,000 mercury-containing fluorescent lamps

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Legislation, continued

Oregon intends to participate in a national product stewardship approach for management of scrap computers, computer peripherals and televisions that serves the needs of Oregon citizens by providing convenient and effective opportunities to reuse and recycle those products. The Oregon approach is to build on a public-private partnership in which responsibilities are shared amongst product manufacturers, retailers, consumers, recyclers and governments.

“The Oregon Economic and Community Development Department (department) is directed to build on the progress of WEPSI and NEPSI by convening stakeholders to explore how Oregon can best develop new business opportunities in electronic reuse and recycling. The Oregon approach should build on the national solution, but develop a strategy for Oregon to move ahead if a national solution is not forthcoming. Based on the input from stakeholders the department should recommend actions that can be taken by consumers, industry, electronics retailers, State, local and regional agencies, and by the legislature, to build a public-private partnership to proactively address this emerging challenge. These actions are intended to develop opportunities for local citizens to recycle their obsolete electronic equipment and for business people to develop sustainable e-scrap businesses. These recommendations shall allocate the share of responsibilities as appropriate to participants in the electronic chain of commerce and government. Based on input from stakeholders and consistent with the forthcoming national approach, the department shall also advise the legislature regarding any actions that may be necessary to provide financing for end-of-life management from the manufacture and purchase of the products.

“The Oregon Department of Environmental Quality is directed to develop guidelines and regulations to ensure the environmentally sound handling and management of scrap electronic products generated in Oregon, including assurance that these products are not simply passed on to other states and

countries where the environment and public health is jeopardized.

“The Oregon Department of Environmental Quality is also directed to establish a deadline for a ban on the disposal of e-scrap in Oregon landfills and incinerators when the reuse and recycling infrastructure is adequate to handle the materials generated in Oregon. The Department of Environmental Quality shall coordinate these activities with the recommendations of the Economic and Community Development Department.

“The Oregon Department of Administrative Services is directed to develop, in cooperation with the Sustainable Supplier Council, purchasing guidelines so that electronic equipment, when purchased by the State and local governments, includes provisions for supplier take-back and their environmentally sound management at end-of-life. These guidelines should reduce the State’s total cost of ownership by providing a preference for products that are designed for longer life, upgradeability, cost-effective recycling, and reduction of waste and hazardous substances.”

If you are interested in joining a notification list for demonstrating support for this proposal in Salem or have any input on our ideas, please contact us by e-mail at info@recyclingadvocates.org.

DEQ Awards, continued

from the solid waste stream from 10 to 15 hospitals in the first year, with additional hospitals taking part in the future.

The City of Portland, working with the non-profit computer reuse and recycling organization Free Geek, has been awarded \$20,000 to help Free Geek expand its warehouse space so the organization can process more computers and other electronic equipment. Currently, Free Geek has been unable to keep up with the local demand to donate computers for reuse. The non-profit is seeking to expand its existing facility by renting and remodeling an additional 5,000 square feet of adjacent space by the end of 2003.

The DEQ awarded the City of Portland, working with Portland State University, another \$20,000 to help Portland State broaden its on-campus waste prevention and recovery efforts. Currently, Portland State recycles 15 percent of its waste and sends to landfills more than 2,000 tons of material per year. In its efforts to minimize waste and recycle more, the university is developing a three-phase recycling program. This grant will focus on Phase II program needs, which include the hiring of a recycling coordinator who will launch the expanded recycling program and coordinate the labor to collect and manage the recyclable materials.

Source: DEQ press release



**RECYCLING ADVOCATES
Membership Application**

\$25 Regular \$10-24 Living Lightly \$50 Sustainer \$_____ Other

*I'm giving a gift membership to the recipient below.**

Please enclose a check and mail to: PO Box 6736, Portland, OR 97228-6736

Name _____

Address _____

Phone Day _____ Evening _____

E-mail _____

*Your name, if this is a gift membership: _____

Your membership contribution to RA is tax-deductible to the full extent of the law.

Valentine's Day gift idea: RA memberships last longer than chocolates!

Upcoming Events and Workshops

An Evening with David Suzuki

Presenter: David Suzuki, award-winning scientist and environmentalist, is well known to millions as the host of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's popular science television series, *The Nature of Things*.

Date: February 4, 2003

Time: 7:00 pm

Location: Portland, Smith Memorial Student Union, ROOM 355, 1825 SW Broadway

For more details go to www.sustainableportland.org or www.green-rated.org or call (503) 823-7725. Admission charged.

Note: The event includes a special preview of ReThink - Innovation in Ecological Design and Construction, a green building training series developed by The City of Portland Office of Sustainable Development and Metro.

ILLAHEE Environment Matters Evening Lecture Series

The Rise and Fall of Civilizations

Presenter: Jared Diamond

Date: February 5, 2003

Time: 7:30 pm

Location: Portland, First Congregational Church, 1126 SW Park

For more details e-mail ned@illahee.org or call (503) 222-2719. Admission charged.

Recycling Advocates Board Meeting

Date: February 19, 2003

Time: 7:30 pm

For location and information, call 503-777-0909.

The Healthy Environment Forum

Healthy Schools: Keeping Kids Safe From Environmental Threats

Presenter: Barbara Sattler, RN, DrPH, of the University of Maryland

Date: February 20, 2003

Time: 6:00 pm - 8:00 pm

Location: Portland, Multnomah Athletic Club, 1849 SW Salmon

For more details go to www.orcouncil.org or call (503) 222-1963. Admission charged.

Oregon Natural Step Network

Making the Case for Sustainability Using the Natural Step Framework
Presenters: Duke Castle and Darcy Hitchcock

Dates: February 6-7, 2003

Times: (2/6) Noon - 5:00 pm; (2/7) 8:30 am-5:00 pm

Location: Portland, World Forestry Center

For more details visit www.ortns.org or call (503) 241-7429. Admission charged.

Developing and Using Sustainability Indicators

Presenters: Various workshop leaders and speakers

Date: February 27, 2003

Time: 8:30 am - 4:15 pm

Location: Beaverton, Nike World Headquarters

For more details visit www.ortns.org or call (503) 241-7429. Admission charged.

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