

Pitching in: recycling becomes a reality

Campus community adapts to collection of reusable materials

by Robb Frederick
The Collegian

You've seen them in hallways, in residence hall laundry rooms, and in the Wintergreen Cafe -- bulky, white cardboard boxes, emblazoned with the blue label reading "PENN STATE RECYCLES." They first appeared in September 1990 under the guidelines of Act 101, Pennsylvania's "Municipal Waste Planning, Recycling and Waste Reduction Act." The legislation, signed into law by Governor Robert Casey on July 28, 1988, called for implementation of curbside recycling programs for all municipalities with populations of at least 5,000 by September 1991.

Within four months, more than 35 tons of recyclable material -- glass, aluminum and bi-metallic cans and hi-grade office paper -- had been deposited in the cardboard receptacles. The trend continued during the Spring semester of 1991, when another 32 tons of reusable waste were collected.

According to John Ream, director of Operations, these numbers indicate a sincere commitment to recycling.

"We are currently recycling 18.5 percent of our waste stream," he explains. "That's still a bit below the state's goal of 25 percent, but it's a good start."

The numbers also raise a few questions, however; most notably, where does all that waste go?

Once filled, the recycling boxes are emptied by Housing and Food Services workers and members of the College's janitorial crew, who deposit the materials into a dumpster located behind the Wintergreen Cafe. This dumpster is emptied monthly or bi-monthly (depending on waste flow) and shipped to Waste Management, 1154 W. 16th St., a processing center which separates and sells reusable materials to regional natural resource markets.

"We process more than 1,000 tons of material each month from Erie alone," says Bud Sprague, a special projects manager for Waste Management. "With that kind of volume, it's impossible to not flood the market, and that's where we've run into problems."

The creation of Act 101 further complicated matters, Sprague says.

"In 1990, we (Waste Management) had 195

communities on line," he explains, "and since then we've added 211 more." The company's service area extends west to Ashtabula and east to Corry, including several municipalities reaching as far south as Greenville.

After being sorted, recyclables are sold for various uses: paper is sorted by grades and turned into products such as corrugated cardboard and shredded animal bedding, while aluminum and glass products are sold to their respective resource markets. Plastic, the most versatile resource, can be used to make outdoor carpet fiber and to insulate sleeping bag liners.

Before deciding to work through Waste Management, Behrend officials contemplated transferring recyclables directly to resource markets.

"We thought about selling the products ourselves, but it's just too chancy," Ream explains. "There basically isn't enough of a market for recyclables, other than for aluminum cans."

Under the agreement with Waste Disposal, the College receives a minimal payment for recyclable wastes. But that amount, according to Ream, is countered by the fee Waste Management charges for regular garbage removal.

"The current arrangement is convenient because it ties our recycling efforts into our established waste removal system," he says. "But we're certainly not making money on our recyclables. In fact, we're actually losing money in this area."

"On the other hand," he continues, "by removing recyclables from our regular waste stream, we don't have to increase our regular trash pickups. So we're pretty much

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Director of Operations**

breaking even in the long run."

Ream would like to see improvements in other areas, however.

"There's still a fair amount of recyclables finding their way into the trash cans," he explains. "But through additional work on education, we can get more people involved." Suggested



Greg Geibel/The Collegian

Drop it in: Karen Salsbury, fifth semester management, places a glass bottle into a Reed Building recycling bin. More than 32 tons of reusable materials were collected on campus last Spring.

educational tactics include informational fliers, table-tents and "polite reminders" for students and employees who are not recycling.

Another improvement would be the collection of additional recyclables, Ream adds.

"I'd really like to see the collection of plastic materials,

Sprague, who deals first-hand with the technology used to sort and sterilize reusable products, agrees. "We've seen a lot of changes in the last 17 months," he explains. "The mills are getting better equipment and more effective technology, but we still need more involvement from the consumers, the people

particularly near the apartments, where students use more cleaning and cooking products."

In spite of these weak areas, Ream believes recycling is here to stay.

"I think recycling has just passed through its infancy and begun to come into its own," he says.

who create the demand for recycled products."

For more information on recycling, call the recycling hotline (toll-free) at 1-800-346-4242, or the Meadville Regional Office of the Bureau of Waste Management at 724-8526.

RECYCLING 101...

Act 101, Pennsylvania's recycling and waste reduction act, was created to promote recycling and reduce the amount of waste entering state landfills. Before the legislation was passed in 1988, approximately 98 percent of Pennsylvania's municipal waste went into landfills.

One major goal of Act 101 is to recycle 25 percent of the state's waste by 1997. To meet this goal, most communities are now required to recycle glass, aluminum or bi-metallic cans and paper products.

The following information, provided by the Department of Environmental Resources, explains other methods of meeting that goal.

- **Automotive battery recycling:** Under Act 101, Pennsylvania residents must recycle lead acid batteries. This can be done by delivering automobile batteries to retailers or wholesalers, or to a collection or recycling facility authorized by the state.

- **Leaf disposal:** Mandated municipalities have been required to separate leaf waste from other municipal waste since September 26, 1990.

- **Newsprint for animal bedding:** Pennsylvania's potential market for animal bedding for dairy cattle is estimated at 500,000 tons per year. Current bedding materials, such as straw, wood chips and sawdust, can cost in excess of \$50 per ton. By using newsprint for bedding, that cost can be reduced to less than \$25 per ton annually.

- **Increased attention to current recycling:** The Department of Energy Resources estimates that Americans discarded more than one million tons of aluminum cans and foil, four million tons of office paper, 10 million tons of newsprint, and 11 million tons of glass bottles and jars during 1990. Strict adherence to municipal recycling programs can drastically reduce these numbers.

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