

RECYCLING: Dumping and contamination are a problem at center

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engage in “wishful recycling” — putting inappropriate materials in bins wishing or hoping that it will get recycled.

The biggest direct impact on city staff is dealing with illegal dumping.

“What’s killing us is the hazardous waste,” said Wanda Braughton, maintenance supervisor with the City Public Works Department.

People are leaving anti-freeze and a lot of paint at the site — where it doesn’t belong. That means a work crew has to gather it up, load it into a trailer and haul it off to Deschutes County disposal sites.

“We actually have to take it to the right facilities, and we’re not budgeted for that,” Braughton said.

Dealing with hazardous waste dumping also takes personnel away from other tasks.

“We’re a very small crew,” Braughton noted.

Ace Hardware in Sisters will take paint and stain only. Knott Landfill in Bend will

receive hazardous materials.

Braughton noted that the Sisters center will take used motor oil — but that service is designed for individual citizens, not for commercial use.

“Businesses need to recycle their own oil,” she said.

Braughton thinks that the public doesn’t understand that the facility is a recycling center only.

“It’s not a transfer site,” she said. “It’s incredible, the household garbage that’s left there.”

Braughton said she’s been confronted with trashcans completely full of somebody’s cat litter — which has to be scooped out by hand.

The recycle center is unmanned and open 24/7, which makes catching illegal dumpers a challenge. That will be changing, though. Braughton noted that the facility’s security cameras are now properly operational, and the City will monitor illegal dumping and refer incidents to the sheriff’s office for investigation.

The center has operated on more restricted hours before, but that didn’t solve the problem of illegal dumping. People just dumped their recycling — and garbage — at the locked gate, leaving it for public works to deal with.



PHOTO BY JIM CORNELIUS

Sisters Recycling Center is a vital service in town — but it gets abused by dumpers.

“It’s a small percentage,” Braughton said of the dumpers. “And when you have a facility like that, you have to expect it. You do. Doesn’t make it right.”

Braughton also cited problems with people failing to break their cardboard boxes down, which uses up the allotted bin space quickly. When the bins get full, people then just dump their cardboard in the aisles.

“We spend so much time breaking down cardboard boxes and sorting out the waxed that’s not acceptable,” she said. “I think we’ve got a lot of room for cardboard — if it’s broken down.”

A few extra minutes, a little extra effort and a little more awareness of what can and can’t be recycled will go a long way toward reducing the burden on public works staff and making the recycling center more effective.

Sisters Public Works Director Paul Bertagna

acknowledged that there will always be some problems — but he’s hopeful that raising awareness will cut back on inappropriate recycling and dumping at the site.

“We’re not going to be able to curtail the bad behavior,” he said. “But maybe we can guide people who want to do the right thing.”



PHOTO PROVIDED

Public Works crews have to haul away loads of paint.

Recycling market roiled by China action

Problems with illegal dumping and improper recycling are not the only ones plaguing the recycling industry, which has been roiled by a decision by China to stop accepting post-consumer plastics and unsorted paper.

In a memo sent to the City of Sisters, High County Disposal noted that “Until recently, China has been the world’s largest importer of recycled paper and plastic. This announcement has severely disrupted recycling markets worldwide with major impact in Oregon.”

NPR reports that “The U.S. exports about one-third of its recycling, and nearly half goes to China. For decades, China has used recyclables from around the world to supply its manufacturing boom. But this summer it declared that this ‘foreign waste’ includes too many other nonrecyclable materials that are ‘dirty,’ even ‘hazardous.’ In a filing with the World Trade Organization the country listed 24 kinds of solid wastes it would ban ‘to protect China’s environmental interests and people’s health.’”

The local impact remains


unclear.

“The garbage and recycling haulers, recycled material processors, local government and DEQ are preparing for different possibilities and developing strategies to maintain recycling collection and processing where possible,” HCD reported.

Residents are encouraged to continue recycling, but to stop “wishful recycling” — putting an item into a recycling container that doesn’t belong, assuming it will be recycled (*see related story, page 1*).

“Any items that are dirty or not on the list of materials accepted for recycling in your local market leads to contamination,” HCD states. “A good mantra to follow is, when in doubt, find out.”

Customers can visit www.highcountrydisposal.com and download a recycling guide that lists what items are acceptable in your blue commingle recycling cart. Recyclers are encouraged to follow the recycling guide and to remember to keep all types of plastic bags and film out of recycling carts. (*See “Recycling Preparation Guide” on page 18.*)



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