

Earth Day spirit boosts recycling

Recyclers say bigger market needed to make a profit

By June Russell
Emerald Reporter

In April, a nation tuned in to Earth Day '90 specials on their televisions to watch celebrities urge greater environmental and recycling awareness.

Everywhere they looked, it was evident — in the newspapers, on the radio, in demonstrations on campus and around the nation.

With the messages about the growing environmental concern came a word of warning, that this awareness not become just another passing fad to be forgotten once Earth Day was over. Six months later, it seems people have taken the warning to heart.

"Earth Day crystallized and helped focus public attention on recycling," said Ken Sandusky, recycling coordinator for the Lane County Waste Management Division. "When you do that, people who have been saying they should do it get that extra push and they decide to recycle."

Sani Pac Oregon Ltd. curbside recycling manager Darrell Lyons said participation in recycling programs has surged dramatically.

Curbside recycling increased 400 to 500 percent since the introduction of the blue curbside pick-up boxes in May. Lyons said, and recycling under the program jumped from an average 30,000 pounds in January to 150,000 pounds currently.

"Earth Day brought recycling more into the mainstream," said Pamela Burnett, Weyerhaeuser Co.'s paper recycling plant manager. "It's been a change in attitude, that this is not just garbage to be thrown away. And that's been real positive for us."

Although Sandusky reported that trash haulers collected nearly as much recycled materials in the first half of 1990 as they did all year in 1989, he said no official data on the

quarter since Earth Day will be available until later this month.

Trash haulers collected 2,075 tons of recyclable materials from January through July of this year, compared with the 2,185 tons of newspaper, cardboard, glass, aluminum and plastics collected in all of 1989.

Sandusky said part of the increase comes from a new awareness of recycling generated by Earth Day. Another contributing factor is the \$1.50 rebate the City of Eugene began last fall for sorted recyclable materials in curbside collections.

Recycling is not a concern of just citizens, Sandusky said. Waste disposal companies, businesses and local government bodies are also working to incorporate environmental awareness into their work.

"Now when you go to the government to seek funding for a project, there is a high level of support for environmental concerns and questions on why we don't do more," Sandusky said. "You never used to hear that."

"Another sign of change is the growing progressiveness of waste haulers," he added. "The haulers that collect these materials are not just picking up the trash and going home at the end of the day. Now they're waste managers."

The expectations consumers have for their waste disposal companies have changed, Sandusky said. The Oregon Recycling Opportunity Act went into effect in 1986, establishing a minimum for recycling collecting and recycling facilities at landfill sites. Today the minimum of recyclable materials that haulers must collect is regularly surpassed.

The benefits companies have found in recycling go beyond the mere economic advantages, Sandusky said. In today's competitive market, meeting con-

sumers' expectations and portraying an image of environmental consciousness can be very important. Sandusky cited McDonald's move to recycling bins in-house as one example of using recycling for more favorable public relations.

"Businesses have always done what is in their economic best interests," Sandusky said. "It's cheaper to recycle than to have it hauled away. Even given that there's an unavoidable cost in disposing of recyclable materials, they may decide it's worth the cost, because of the public relations, community response or their own consciences."


Landfills are one example of how environmental concerns translate into economic benefits for the company that recycles.

"Landfill space is at a premium," Lyons said. "Once we run out of room at a landfill site, trying to find another site is very difficult. By reducing what goes into the landfill, you're extending the life of that landfill site. You're also saving resources and energy."

One of the main barriers to recycling on a greater scale is the lack of markets for recyclable materials. Once the materials are collected, a buyer with the capability to process and recycle the materials is needed. In many cases, this means shipping the materials across the state or even overseas.

The lack of recycling facilities in Oregon is combining with the increases in the collecting of recyclable materials to create an oversupply of materials and a glut in the market. This results in driving down the prices haulers receive for the materials they collect.

"No doubt about it — I want to make this very clear," Lyons said. "We lose money from recycling. Recycling is not cost effective. It costs more to collect the materials than any revenue we get from what we collect."



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