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GUEST EDITORIAL

FROM THE EAST OREGONIAN

Wishful thinking hurting recycling efforts

When it comes to recycling, Oregonians have been fooling themselves for years.

We've been placing all sorts of items in curbside recycling bins, assuming that was appropriate because, well, it seems as if they should be recyclable — garden hoses, diapers, pots and pans, plastic bags, wire hangers, clamshell food containers — even bowling balls.

However, such "wishful recycling" continues to undermine the recycling process by gumming up the sorting machines and creating more work for crews who had to get rid of the items. Meanwhile, some non-recyclables still made it through the recycling stream, ending up in bales of cardboard, paper or sorted plastics.

That contamination no longer is acceptable to the world's largest market for recycling paper and plastics: China.

As of this year, China is rejecting imports of sorted paper and post-consumer plastics that exceed 0.5 percent contamination. That's almost impossible for most countries to meet. Despite Oregonians' passion for recycling, their "wishful recycling" has resulted in a contamination rate that averages from 8 percent to 13 percent, according to the state Department of Environmental Quality.

The DEQ said with the Chinese market now closed, more than 10,000 tons of comingled materials have wound up in Oregon landfills this year.

That is less than 2 percent of all material collected for recycling. Still, Oregonians have to change their ways.

Jurisdictions that offer curbside recycling are now looking at raising collection fees, because they must pay companies to accept certain recyclables.

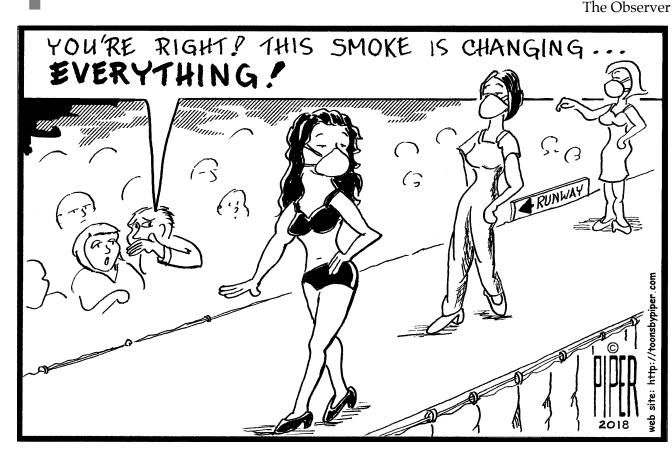
Plastic is a prime concern because different plastics must be recycled differently — if there even is a market for them. For example, plastic bags are recyclable, but not in curbside bins because they snarl the sorting machinery.

So what can we do?

- Pay attention to packaging and lifespan when making purchases. Strive to reuse whenever possible, instead of discarding.
- Carry our own containers for water, coffee and other beverages instead of using disposable cups.
- Learn which materials can be recycled at curbside. Instead of assuming something is recyclable, we need to be realistic.
- Remember that some items can be taken to recycling depots that pop up around Eastern Oregon.
 These include plastic bags, shredded paper and certain metals.
- Make sure all recyclables, whether put on the curb or taken to a depot, are clean. For example, shredded paper taken to a recycling depot should not include shredded plastic credit cards. Neither should food scraps be put in with recycling.

Meanwhile, as individuals and as organizations, we must do all we can to encourage expansion of local, regional and U.S. markets for recycled materials. That means we should purchase more products made with recycled materials and support corporations who are working to reduce waste.

That is a long-term process but ultimately a better solution than relying on other countries to welcome our garbage with open arms.



Rep. Greg Walden rubber-stamps Trump while he ignores Oregonians

Rep. Greg Walden, who hasn't held a town hall in La Grande for years, once again crept into town and as usual, we learned about it the next day in The Observer ("Walden: Tax cuts stoking economic boom," July 14). This time, it was a photo op with fellow Republican Greg Barreto during a visit to the "Republican echo chamber" at Barreto's factory. Typically, Walden made no effort to meet with other voters in his district.

Walden, who backs President Trump 99 percent of the time, says the Republican tax plan has created so many new jobs that "companies cannot fill positions with workers." Nonetheless, Walden voted for the Border Security and Immigration Reform Act, which would seem to make it difficult to fill all these new jobs.

When I asked Walden if the act included funding for a border wall with Mexico and for how much, he didn't answer, so I went online and found that the "\$16,625,000,000 shall be for a border wall system" (www. congress.gov). That's more than 16 billion dollars. So much for Republicans being fiscal conservatives.

This same bill is condemned by the American Academy of Pediatrics, as it "strips children of protections designed for their safety and wellbeing and exposes more children, not fewer, to detention, including long-term detention" (www.aap.org). These pediatricians point out that in addition to separating terrified children from their families, "forcing children to sleep on cement floors, (using) open toilets, constant light exposure, insufficient food and water, no bathing facilities, and extremely cold temperatures are traumatizing for children." So much for Republicans being pro-family.

Obviously Walden is afraid to meet with the voters of his district. How could he defend his efforts to remove health care for 20 percent of his constituents? When I attempted to engage Barreto online with discussion about affordable health care, he also abruptly quit talking. Why are these Republicans so hesitant to discuss issues such as health care, immigration or tax reform with residents of their district? Could it be because they represent the "1 percent" and the lobbyists from big business?

Walden has more than \$3 million of cash in hand in his campaign chest (www.opensecrets.org), \$367,000 of which came from the pharmaceutical industry. His billboard says "I'm working for you." The "you" is obviously drug companies, not us.

Walden has been in Washington for too long. He rubber-stamps

My Voice ABOUTTHE AUTHOR

Matt Cooper lives in La Grande. My Voice columns reflect the views of the author only. My Voice columns should be 500-



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Trump while he ignores Oregonians. What single important thing has he done for the people of rural Oregon?

I'm voting for Walden's opponent, Jamie McLeod-Skinner ("McLeod-Skinner looks for common ground," The Observer July 4).

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