

Plastic lumber being tested for use at the ELC

by Jim Titus
Copyeditor

The John Innskeep Environmental Learning Center, prompted by a \$30,000 grant from AMOCO Foam Company, has begun testing "plastic lumber," a construction material made from recycled waste plastic and polystyrene foam.

According to ELC director Jerry Herrmann, the center will use the material to construct items such as signs and bridges for use at the ELC. Several signs have already been constructed, along with a bridge across the fish pond at the center.

There are currently only three places in North America that the lumber is produced: one in Canada, Iowa, and the plastic technology program at Rutgers University, NJ. The ELC receives their lumber from the Rutgers program.

Plastic lumber is produced from waste plastics, such as milk jugs and soda pop containers, and polystyrene foam. According to Herrmann, the material has proven as strong as Douglas fir (the most common lumber used in construction) and can be cut, nailed, and bolted just like wood without the hazards of pressure treated lumber. Pressure treated lumber contains chemicals that are used as wood preservatives. These chemicals "leech" out of the lumber into the environment, causing hazards for both humans and wildlife.

"The last time I used pressure treated lumber I discovered that the sawdust alone will kill fish. Sawdust looks like food to the fish. They swim up and eat it and just like that they're dead. Pressure treated lumber is really lethal stuff," Herrmann said. The new bridge across the ELC pond will be without such dangers to the pond's aquatic life.

"Plastic is inherently non-biodegradable," Herrmann explained, "and it doesn't have any of the dangers of pressure treated lumber. We think this lumber will make a very good substitute for anyplace you would use conventional, pressure treated lumber, such as landscaping and steps. The state highway division could easily have sign posts made out of this material, and it would never biologically degrade."

The process for producing the plastic lumber, known as ET-1, was originally developed in Belgium. The process uses a device similar to a gatling gun with ten foot barrels. The molten plastic is "co-mingled," or mixed together, and injected into these barrels to harden. The barrels are different sizes, allowing lumber to be produced in a variety of dimensions up to ten feet long.

"Because the process consumes co-mingled plastics and forms from them a final, durable product, it really is a solution to

the proliferation of plastic waste," stated Herrmann. One 2 by 6 made from plastic weighs thirty pounds and contains the equivalent of three hundred plastic milk jugs.

Recently the Portland City Council passed a resolution banning the use of polystyrene foam in the city limits because of the substances proliferation in landfills and its alleged danger to the ozone layer because of its chlorofluorocarbon content. But Herrmann feels that this move was a mistake. According to Herrmann, polystyrene producers no longer use chlorofluorocarbons in the production of polystyrene foam. If the polystyrene could be recycled as an ingredient in the plastic lumber the ban would be unnecessary.

"I'm really concerned about this foam issue, because it isn't solving anything. It is bringing public awareness up, which is important, and it has definitely caught the plastic industry's attention, but now it is time to channel the plastic into some productive solution," Herrmann said.

There is no production facility for plastic lumber on the west coast, but that may change. Wayne Pierson, from the National Plastic Recycling Association, is planning to mention the establishment of a west coast program Mar. 16 at the dedication of the ELC's new bridge made of plastic lumber.



This bridge is just one example of the uses of plastic lumber. Another use for it would be in the construction of signs for the Environmental Learning Center. Plastic lumber is produced from waste plastics, such as milk jugs and soda pop containers.

Speech team to travel to San Francisco

by Angela Wilson
Staff Writer

Seven members of the Clackamas speech team are going to San Francisco for the San Francisco State Attorney Judged Tournament on March 9.

The topic being debated is increased restrictions on gun control. The students participating in the meet from Clackamas are Kevin Swanson, Sara Lack, Jill Overfield, Mitch Sherrard, Daralyn White, Kathy Meggert, and Kate Skyles.

"This will definitely be an educational tournament rather than a competition," said Randy Baker, head of the speech department.

In teams of two they will debate the topic in eight rounds, four

times on the affirmative side, and four times on the negative side of the topic. After the scores from the first eight rounds are counted the finals begin, and it is single elimination until there is a winner.

Baker coaches the team to present the topic in speech form at the tournaments. The emphasis is put on the "quality rather than the quantity" when presented this way.

"I tell them 'that's a good argument'. Then I ask 'do you think it is true?'" Baker said.

Some teams debate in what is called auctioneer style. In this style the team will try to read as much evidence out on the topic

as fast as they can in the time allowed.

"They treat the debate like a game. As a result they will do what ever it takes to win, and the judges evaluate on that basis," Baker said.

"If people go to a debate and see auctioneer style, and they don't like what they hear just call the college president," Baker said. "That is what happened to UCLA, and their speech program was canceled for two years."

The tournament has a "broad appeal", and colleges from all over the country will be competing this weekend at San Francisco State University.

Styrofoam not banned in Clackamas County

by Roseann Wentworth
Staff Writer

The Portland City Council recently passed an ordinance banning polystyrene-foam food containers to take effect January 1, 1990.

This ordinance does not effect vendors in Clackamas County, which includes Clackamas Community College. Rapid plans to follow the City of Portland are not on the agenda according to Jim Buckley of the Environmental Department of Clackamas County. Chlorofluorocarbons (CFC's) are released by the foam as it deteriorates in the form of garbage. CFCs contribute to global warming and holes in the earth's ozone layer.

CFCs are also widely used for refrigeration, air conditioning, and electrical component cleaning.

Many restaurants, fast-food and those who use take-out, are notorious for using polystyrene food containers...including Norm's Cafe at Clackamas Community College.

Students and staff have repeatedly bought, used and discarded the styrofoam cups found at Norm's Cafe. Are these particular beverage containers adding to the depletion of our ozone layer? No.

Not all polystyrene products use chlorofluorocarbons in the manufacturing process.

Most manufacturers in America today are utilizing other alternatives to blow up the plastic product into styrofoam.

This still leaves another acute problem: litter. This foam material is not biodegradable. It is, however, recyclable although the economical aspects have been criticized.

A Clackamas County Recycling Committee does not support a ban on polystyrenes, as the Portland Council does. Rather, they would like to see better funded recycling programs for this material.

For now, Norm's Cafe will continue using the polystyrene containers.

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