

NEWS

BY MICHAEL TOBIN

LANE COUNTY'S RECYCLING RUNDOWN

Commingling gone crazy

Carrying a plastic bag with orange bell peppers in it, Eugene resident Dillon Vibes was doing his weekend recycling at Market of Choice on Franklin Boulevard.

Vibes has a hard time deciding which items to place in what recycling bin. "I separate the glass and plastic, but not always and not as well as I should, and I know that it's wrong, but it's hard to do 100 percent all the time," he says.

Like many of us, Vibes is frustrated by the recycling changes introduced in April by Eugene and Lane County, which largely involve a confusing reduction in the type of plastics being accepted in different areas.

Oregonians love recycling but we are doing it wrong, and that's a large part of why the confusing changes have been put into place. In Eugene, commingle bins only accept transparent drink bottles and milk jugs. This is also true for pickup in Springfield, Veneta and Creswell, all served by Sanipac. But in the rural pickup areas of Florence, Junction City, Oakridge, Cottage Grove, Coburg and Vida, there are no plastics accepted at all. Lane County transfer stations only accept transparent milk jugs, according to the county website.

Several readers have written *Eugene Weekly* and cited the changes in recycling rules in Eugene and Lane County and asked why particular things, like plastic milk jugs in Cottage Grove, can't be recycled.

The answer is largely due to how consumers view what they throw in the bins and how the haulers who pick it up dispose of it. A November 2017 OPB story cited an instance in which it cost \$115 to recycle a ton of plastic compared to \$30 to send it to the landfill. A Lane Community College study showed that in 2013-14 it cost \$359.21 to recycle one ton of material including food wastes, paper and plastics and \$717.11 to landfill it.

Consumers who recycle are accustomed to simply throwing things in their bins, but Kelly Bell, who works for Lane County Master Recycler Program, said that commingled recycling is a product that was mixed for efficiency, bought by haulers and sold to China.

Now, though, commingle has created a problem, largely because of contamination.

"We've become so efficient that we've created garbage," Bell says. China no longer wants our tainted recycling.

Tempting as it is to throw everything into your commingled recycle bin, this practice leads to contamination. Pizza boxes, plastic produce bags and glass are all contaminants that end up in commingled recycling and cause problems down the line.

The plastic produce bags that Vibes placed his orange bell peppers in, for example, get caught in the screens of the ma-

chines at material recovery facilities, or MRFs, that process recyclable materials. The debris disrupts the sorting process, and workers have to stand underneath the screens and cut it off.

The good news, Lane County says, is that many grocery stores are still accepting plastic bags and recycling them.

"Contamination means people are recycling things they want to recycle, but are actually not recyclable," says Sarah Grimm, a waste reduction specialist at Lane County Public Works. "It is improper things that are going into the recycling. What people don't seem to get is how important it is to recycle only what they've been told to recycle."

Vibes' green produce bag, which should be thrown in the trash, is an example of trash in the recycling stream.

"I'm definitely not as careful as I should be when I recycle," he admits. Vibes says that with all the bins and containers, recycling can be complicated for consumers and that information on what could go where might help people to recycle properly.

"I think if there were a much easier way, like everyone knew exactly where it was they would do it, but a big issue is not knowing what goes where, and it's much more convenient to throw everything in the trash," Vibes explains.

Lane County recognizes the gap between consumers, recycling haulers like Sanipac and those in local government who are dealing with the current recycling crisis. Bell said that the key to recycling properly is information, and "good information is easily obtainable."

One tool Lane County developed to provide that information is the Garbage Guru, a county-run website that instructs consumers on how, and where, to dispose of items from plastic shopping bags to popsicle sticks and pool chemicals. Sanipac offers an app of its own, listing pick up days and what can be recycled.

Bell and Lane County Waste Management also offer recycling courses to educate consumers on how to properly recycle. The Master Recycler Class starts Sept. 11 and runs 6-9 pm every Tuesday until Nov. 6.

And don't forget, thanks to Oregon's bottle bill, many drink bottles can be redeemed for 10 cents each at stores and redemption centers, and that includes plastic bottles.

But even with consumers recycling responsibility and correctly, Bell says that at the heart of the current recycling crisis lies the bigger issue of consumption.

"The less we bring home the less we have to think about," Bell says. ■

MORE TRASHY CHANGES AHEAD?

The city plans to change the definition of "compacted material" in the Solid Waste Administrative Rule, which could negatively affect local recycling, according to local group, Team Recycle. A comment period on the change ends July 30. Under the current definition, garbage is considered to be solid waste if it is compressed by a mechanical process, and the new definition would redefine compacted waste as "compressed by any means which reduces the solid waste in size, after the solid waste has been placed in a solid waste receptacle by the person who generated the solid waste."

Kristen Bartels, a spokeswoman for Team Recycle tells *EW* via email that the change could affect the amount of material recovered, "Without the proposed change we would be on track to recover 500,000 lbs. this year but if the amendment to compacting passes that number will be cut in half. Meaning 250,000 lbs. of toxic and recyclable materials that Team Recycle would otherwise have recovered will end up in the landfill this year alone."

Bartels adds that the proposed changes to the ordinance will cause many residential, commercial and multifamily customers to pay 150 percent more for the same services.

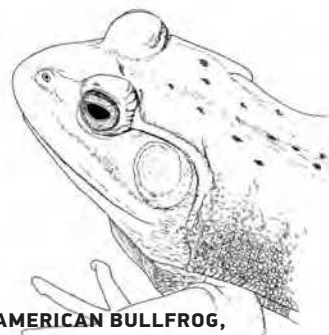
To comment, find ordinance 53-18-10 under the "administrative order" link at the Eugene City Recorder's Office and send comments to Anna Reid at anna.e.reid@ci.eugene.or.us.

IT'S ABOUT TIME

BY DAVID WAGNER

August brings the peak of summer in western Oregon. Most days are long and skies cloudless. High heat is not always appreciated by humans, but vegetables in a well-watered garden move into high gear. Pole beans planted after the sugar snap peas had been pulled are now producing or will start soon. A five-foot-wide trellis will give an evening's meal every other day until October.

Hiking in the mountains in early August will likely have fewer mosquitoes than usual in past years. Snow-melt ponds where mosquitoes breed will dry out faster. Hot, dry weather caused by global warming is the reason. The downside is that a severe fire season is looming, likely to be as bad as ever. Everybody should be alert and careful with fires, avoiding big campfires away from fire pits in designated campgrounds. Use camp stoves. Cook small meals. Pack those empty canisters out!



AMERICAN BULLFROG,
LITHOBATES CATESBIANA

My birthday in the middle of the month is a signal to be ready for the blackberry season. The non-native Armenian (Himalayan) wild blackberries are a nuisance in pastures and backyards. The berries, however, are produced in large quantities, easy to pick and tasty as any. Seek out the juicy ones close to ponds and riverbanks.

Be sure to maintain watering places for birds in homes with bird feeders. Water sources can be scarce in urban areas. Little birds will particularly appreciate fountains. Running water seems to attract them more readily than birdbaths with shallow water.

David Wagner is a botanist who works in Eugene. He teaches moss classes, leads nature walks and makes nature calendars. He can be contacted through his website, fernzenmosses.com.