

Joshua Bessex/The Daily Astorian

Cans and cardboard are seen in piles at Garten Sevices in Salem.

Oregon hopes to divert trash from landfills

By ERICK BENDEL
The Daily Astorian

You have a love letter from someone you no longer love, and you want to get rid of it.

Tossing it in the trash and letting it lie in a landfill might seem like a fitting end, no doubt. But did you know: If you recycle it, there's a decent chance it could become someone's toilet paper?

A vast, diverse, labyrinthine network of residents, businesses and organizations in Clatsop County bend their efforts toward diverting as much would-be waste from the path to the landfill as possible by making use of the material in some other way.

The state Legislature has set a new statewide resource recovery rate goal: By 2025, the state hopes to prevent 55 percent of Oregon's waste products — glass, paper, plastics, cardboard, metals, wood waste, food waste, yard debris, electronics and others — from becoming garbage.

For the Clatsop County wasteshed, the new recovery rate goal was raised from 25 percent to 53 percent. The county's actual recovery rate for 2014 was 38.1 percent, according to Recology Western Oregon.

Even if the county reaches that goal, however, the average resident probably wouldn't notice a thing. All of that recovery would take place behind the scenes, for the full machinery of waste reduction operates in a kind of blind spot — really, in another dimension for all practical purposes. Once their trash hits the curb, most people never think about it.

Curbside collection

Take that unwanted love letter. Assuming the paper has no tape, glitter or ribbon affixed to it, the owner would place it in his or her red-lidded, Recology-issued cart with other paper products and recyclable items "commingled" together, then roll the cart to the curbside next to the carts with black or green lids containing garbage by 7 a.m. pickup day.

Two different trucks will come by and take the materials to the Astoria Transfer Station on Williamsport Road.

There, the materials will get weighed and dumped into separate piles on the transfer station's "tip floor," a giant, centralized holding facility where both the garbage and commingled recycling of about 700 Recology customers lies on either side of a large partition. A separate room contains heaps of tires, electronic devices, motor oil jugs and batteries that people dropped off independently.

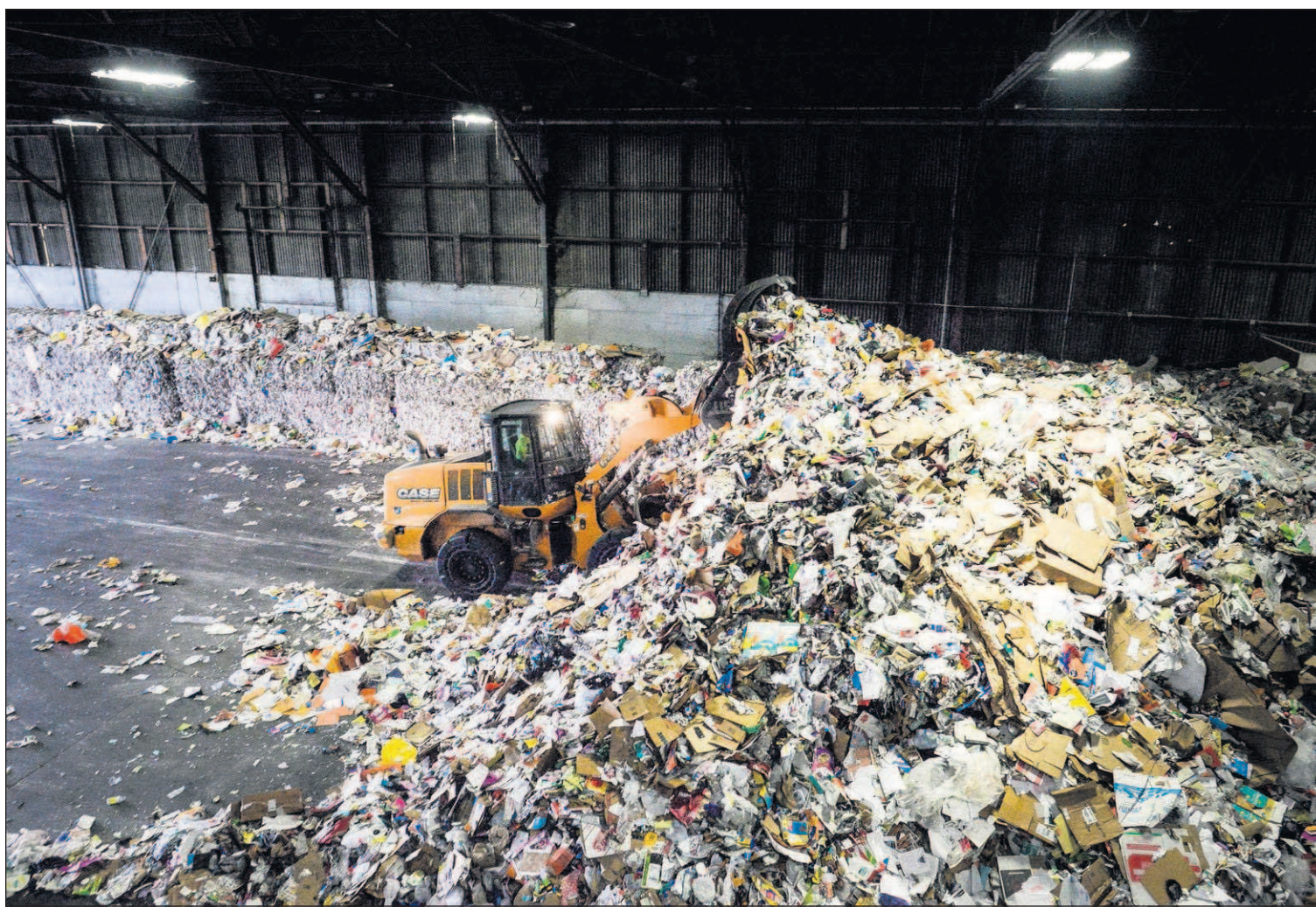
Recology also picks up the public depot bins, distributed throughout the county, where locals and businesses drop off the things that don't go in their commingle — glass, large stacks of cardboard and heavy scrap metal, like car parts and bicycles — and transport them to the transfer station. Meanwhile, many businesses, especially restaurants and big-box stores, haul their own collections of cardboard to that destination.

Diversion

Within two to three days, the segregated superfluity of the county's consumers goes in different directions.

Some materials are aggregated and taken to a mill or a regional recycler. The metal, for example, will head to a metal recycler, like Metro Metals or Schnitzer Steel in Portland. The cardboard will go to Kap-Stone Paper and Packaging in Longview, Washington.

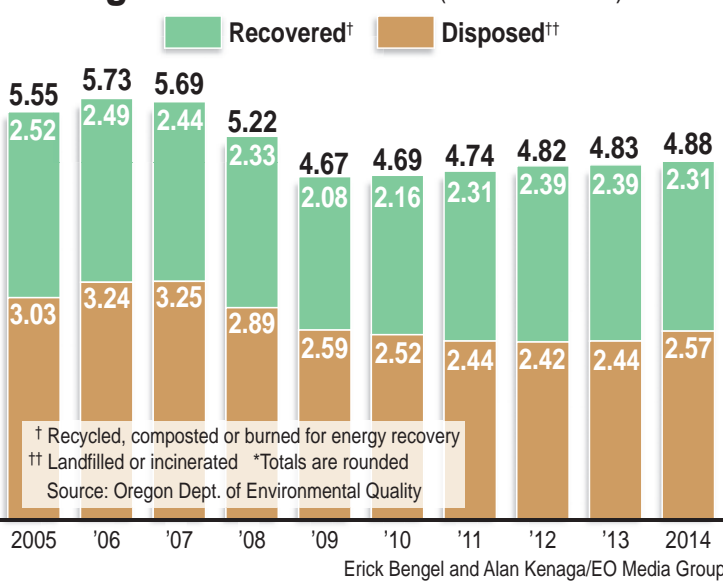
The garbage — all of it — will get trucked



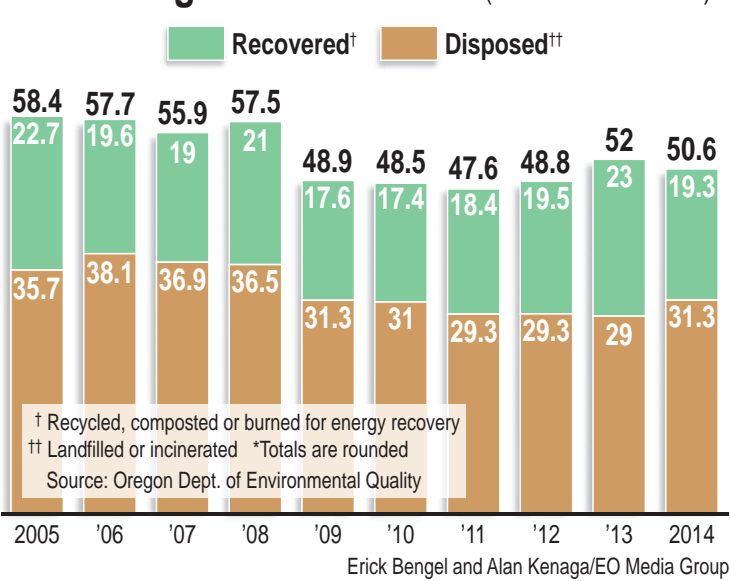
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A loader moves a pile of recyclables at Garten Sevices in Salem.

Oregon waste recovery, disposal and total generated waste* (Millions of tons)



Clatsop County waste recovery, disposal and total generated waste* (Thousands of tons)



to McMinnville, where it will be deposited in the Riverbend Landfill, owned and operated by Waste Management. This is where that love letter would have ended up — where it would have reached its final resting place — had the owner placed it in the trash can.

Instead, the letter, along with most of the commingle, will go to a material recovery facility, a business that accepts recyclable materials and sells them stateside and abroad to "final destination" processors like mills and plants that manufacture new items from those materials.

There are two basic kinds of recovery facilities.

One kind specializes in sorting a small number of materials, and perhaps only one high-value material, like glass, plastics or paper and cardboard.

For example, all of Clatsop County's glass gets sorted at Portland's Glass to Glass Recy-

cling Facility, which uses an optical sorter to process tons upon tons of broken glass — everything from 1-millimeter shards to full bottles — that would be impossible to sort out by hand. Another automated process scrubs and takes the labels off the glass, which then gets sold to plants that convert them back into glass products.

Then there are recovery facilities that sort a wide variety of commingled materials. Using a combination of automated and manual sorting, they group the materials into sellable commodities.

'Kind of a circus'

Garten Services, in Salem, is one of several material recovery facilities where Recology takes Clatsop County's commingle.

Roughly every other week, Recology brings a portion of the commingle to Garten's warehouse, where the materials get deposited

into a massive pile that includes the commingle of other areas.

From there, a loader scoops up the commingle salad mix and drops it into a "hopper," the input end of a large \$1.5 million apparatus with a system of filters and conveyor belts.

At the first belt is the "presort" line.

A group of employees wearing face masks stand on either side of a belt, watching the first run of recycling pass and pulling out things that residents should never have placed on the curb: clothes, wires, diapers, car parts, sleeping bags, Christmas lights, big pieces of rigid plastic like buckets or laundry baskets — and, of course, plastic bags, which often get caught in the machinery and have to be fished out.

"Every day, we have a maintenance person actually put on a harness and go into the machinery and have to cut all this stuff out,"