

Joshua Bessex/The Daily Astorian

A worker pulls nonpaper items off a conveyor belt at Garten Seivics in Salem.

# ‘The consumer holds the greatest power in that loop in choosing what they purchase’

said Will Posegate, the chief operations officer of Garten Services.

From there, the commingle gets pushed through two “screens” of spinning shakers and rollers; the first separates the larger pieces of cardboard, the second separates paper — and this is where the love letter is likely to exit the sorting system. It will fall into a pile that, like the pile of cardboard, will get baled and sold to a mill, to be turned back into a usable paper product.

Downstream, other employees remove remaining pieces of paper and cardboard from the line, along with small light pieces of plastic and aluminum (which can also get picked up by a magnet hovering over the conveyor belt), dropping them down different shoots into yet more piles.

“That’s the end game: Pile things up so they can be sold,” Posegate said. “I’d like to say it’s a ballet; it’s kind of a circus,” he added with affectionate grin.

## The market

Depending on market conditions, the Garten Services’ process yields between 12 and 15 sellable products comprising multiple grades of paper, metal and plastic.

These get sold to about 10 companies, some domestic, some international: fiber to mills, metal to smelters and plastic to plants, many of which operate in China because there’s “not many plastic manufacturers in the states anymore,” Posegate said.

What is left over — the stuff they can neither sort nor sell — goes to Covanta, a waste energy plant in Brooks that generates electricity for approximately 300,000 residents of Marion County.

As with the wider commodities market, the market for recycled items is highly speculative. A recycler designed to process, say, plastics, may have to retool the factory to process a different commodity because the plastics market has suddenly plummeted.

When the price of commingle is relatively high, Garten Services pays Recology for the materials since the company will be able to generate greater profit; when the price is low, the reverse may happen since the cost for Garten to handle the commingle — in labor, energy, and transportation — could exceed the money the company would make by selling it.

“We still have the same amount of materials that we have to process, but we’re not getting paid much for it, maybe not even enough to cover our costs,” Pete Grell, Garten’s recycling operations supervisor, said.

This is why recycling services like Recology and recovery facilities like Garten Services have to mind the market and shop around for their respective outlets, lest the commodities, including the commingle of thousands of consumers, just sit around.

“We want to make sure that we have a home for this product, because this isn’t something that we want to jump in and just out of,” Fred Stemmler, general manager of Recology Western Oregon, said. “We want citizens here and in our markets to have access to stable recycling.”

## Consumer responsibility

Because fossil fuels are burned in the manufacturing of recycled products, releasing greenhouse gas into the atmosphere, the act of recycling alone, however virtuous, will not create a sustainable world.



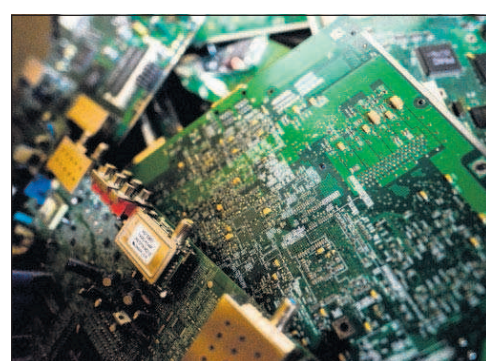
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Workers sort nonpaper items from paper-based items at Garten Seivics in Salem.



Photos by Joshua Bessex/The Daily Astorian

ABOVE: An excavator is used to load a truck with trash at the Recology Western Oregon Transfer Station on Williamsport Road. RIGHT TOP: Galen Berry uses a loader to fill a truck with trash at the Recology Western Oregon Transfer Station. RIGHT MIDDLE: A box of motherboards at Garten Seivics in Salem.



But using recycled materials cuts down on the demand for landfill space while extending the life of existing landfills. And it reduces the needless squandering of virgin materials, like trees, precious metals and the fossil fuel inputs used to harvest them.

Within the consumption-disposal-production-consumption loop, consumers have a two-fold responsibility — to recycle, yes, but also to purchase items manufactured with recycled products.

“The consumer holds the greatest power in that loop in choosing what they

purchase,” Stemmler said.

For without consumer demand — without a place for the products ultimately to go — the system breaks down.

“One of the challenges is making sure we have a robust market for recycled products,” Tom Rocak, CEO of Garten Services, said. “People buying recycled products, or products made of recycled materials, is as important as recycling in your household.”

**Coming Tuesday:** *What do local businesses bring to the recycling and repurposing game?*



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Mark Kalar, operations supervisor, waves at a passing garbage truck at Recology Western Oregon Transfer Station.