

# O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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## OTHER VIEWS

## We're falling behind on recycling

A recent report from the state Department of Environmental Quality about Oregon's goals for recycling included bad news: The state is likely to fall short of its goals for recycling more than half of the waste generated in the state.

For calendar year 2017, the state found, Oregonians recovered or recycled a little more than 2.3 million tons of waste. That works out to be about 42.8 percent of the roughly 5.4 million tons of waste generated in the state.

The problem is that the state's Legislature has set a goal of 52 percent recovery by 2020. (The goal for 2025 is 55 percent.)

Officials told the *Statesman-Journal* newspaper, which reported about the survey, that the 2020 goal now seems out of reach. (A copy of the state report is attached to the online version of this editorial.)

Looking at the trends, it certainly appears as if Oregon is moving in the wrong direction: The recovery rate for the state peaked at 49.7 percent in 2012 and has been sliding since then.

To be fair, the 2017 rate of 42.8 percent was a little better than the 2016 rate, 42.2 percent. And that 42.8 percent rate for 2017 represents about 2.3 million tons of recovered material. That's all stuff that doesn't need to be dumped at a landfill.

And the state report noted some unexpected developments that depressed the state rate. If you've been following developments in the world of recycling, you know about one of them: China's decision near the end of 2017 to ban imports of unsorted paper



EO Media Group/Colin Murphy, File  
A recycling bin full of glass products sits among several for public use at the Astoria Transfer Station on July 24, 2018.

and post-consumer plastics.

But a bigger factor, the state said, was the unexpected 2015 closure of a paper mill in Newberg that was the state's largest user of post-consumer wood waste as a fuel. Other mills stopped using wood waste because of federal air-quality rules, a state official told the *Statesman-Journal*.

That suggests one important lesson about recycling: Even the best intentions don't matter much unless there are markets for that recycled material.

If you need more evidence about the connection between markets and recycling, consider what happened with bottles and cans in 2017: In April of that year, the deposit for those containers doubled, from 5 to 10 cents. Not unexpectedly, 2017 saw a substantial increase in the recycling of those containers.

Here's another example: Scrap metal prices increased in 2017, and so did the amount of metals recovered, which jumped by some 14 percent.

Another hopeful trend involves manufacturers using lightweight packaging instead of heavier materials. The upside, the state said, is that the lighter materials tend to be easier on the environment. The downside is that increasing use of these materials could depress the state's recovery rate, which is based on weight.

The state report contains a wealth of additional information, and some of it is surprising.

The report breaks the state into 35 separate "wastesheds," which Oregon law defines as an area that shares a common solid waste disposal system. Even though they don't exactly correspond to county lines, it's still interesting to take a look at the 2017 numbers for the Benton and Linn wastesheds.

The first surprise: Both wastesheds for Linn and Benton were below the state average.

Another surprise: The Linn wasteshed had a higher recovery rate (37.4 percent) than did the Benton wasteshed (34.5 percent). Both wastesheds were below the 2025 goals set by the state Legislature (45 percent for Linn and 44 percent for Benton).

To be fair, only six wastesheds currently are running ahead of that 2025 goal. The best mark in the state, 52.8 percent, came in Lane County, but that county still trails its 2025 goal of 63 percent.

Hitting the state's ambitious goals will require the development of robust (and stable) markets for recycled material. But here's one more number to think about: Maybe we all could do something to reduce that 5 million tons of stuff we throw away every year.

## OTHER VIEWS

## What real border security looks like

ON THE ISRAEL-LEBANON BORDER — Other than the Korean Peninsula's DMZ, there's probably no border in the world as fraught with the potential for sudden violence as this one, known locally as the Blue Line. Since President Donald Trump thinks border security is the issue of our time, it's worth considering how Israel — with tight borders, real threats, and a no-nonsense attitude toward its security needs — does it.

What I saw Wednesday while traveling along the Blue Line was ... a fence. A fence studded with sensors, to be sure, but by no means an imposing one. This is what a long stretch of the border between two sworn enemies looks like.

Does that look like Trump's idea of a "big beautiful wall"? Does it even look like the "steel slats" the president now offers as his idea of an aesthetic concession to Democrats? Not quite. Yet for the last 19 years it was all the fencing Israelis thought was necessary to secure its side of the Blue Line.

That started to change in December, after Israel announced that it was conducting an operation to destroy tunnels dug by Hezbollah under the border. The tunnel construction — secretly detected by Israel some four years ago — was intended to infiltrate hundreds of Hezbollah fighters into Israel in the event of war. As an additional precaution, Jerusalem is spending an estimated \$600 million to replace about 20 kilometers of the fence with a concrete wall, mainly to provide greater peace of mind to the 162,000 Israelis who live near the Lebanese border.

Such a wall may look formidable. But it won't stop tunnel construction or missile firing, the two principal threats Hezbollah poses to Israel. Nor has Israel felt the need

to erect concrete walls along most of its border with the Gaza Strip, despite Hamas' multiple attempts last year to use mass protests to breach the fence. Israel's border with Egypt is marked by a tall and sturdy "smart fence" packed with electronic sensors, but not a wall. And Israel's longest border, with Jordan, stretching some about 250 miles, has fencing that for the most part is primitive and minimal.

So how does Israel maintain border security? Two ways: close cooperation with neighbors where it's possible and the use of modern technology and effective deterrence where it's not.

Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi recently attested to the depth of cooperation in an interview last week with "60 Minutes" — so deep, in fact, that the Egyptian government made an attempt to stop the interview from airing. Jordan's border patrol typically does its work facing east, not west, to prevent possible penetrations into Israel. Security cooperation with the Palestinian Authority also runs deep despite political differences, since Mahmoud Abbas shares Israel's interest in suppressing Hamas.

As for technology, I saw it at work on a tour earlier Wednesday of an Israeli military base on the Golan Heights. In a crowded, windowless room within a bunker-like structure, 20 or so women soldiers, some of them still teenagers, sat at screens patiently watching every inch of Israel's border with Syria, noticing patterns, prioritizing potential threats, and relaying information to operators in the field.

Why an all-female unit? Because the Israeli military has determined that women have longer attention spans than men. Last August, the unit spotted seven Islamic State fighters, wearing suicide belts and carry-



ing grenades, as they were infiltrating a no man's land on their way to Israel. An airstrike was called in. The men never reached the border.

None of this is to say that physical barriers are invariably pointless or evil. Israel's fence along the Egyptian border all but ended the flow of illegal African migrants, though most illegal immigrants in Israel arrive legally by plane and simply overstay their visas. The much-maligned wall (most of which is also a fence) that divides Palestinians from Israelis in Jerusalem and other parts of the West Bank played a major role in ending the terrorism of the Second Intifada.

Yet the Israeli experience also suggests that the best way to protect a border is to rely on the tools of the 21st century, not the 12th. Walls only occasionally provide the

most reliable security. They can be dangerous for providing the illusion of security. And there are vastly more effective means than concrete to defend even the most dangerous borders. Why can't Democrats and Republicans simply agree to build additional smart fencing in places where it's missing and call it, for political effect, an "Israeli-style barrier"?

The good news for the U.S. is that we don't face Hezbollah, Hamas or ISIS across our border, only people who overwhelmingly want to relieve their own plight and contribute their labor for everyone's betterment. If we really wanted to secure the border, our first priority should be to make it easier for them to arrive through the front door rather than sneak in through the back.

Brett Stephens is a columnist for the *New York Times*.



BRETT STEPHENS  
COMMENT