



Sorted plastics sit in bins at the entrance to the Sanitary Disposal facility Friday outside of Hermiston.

STAFF PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS

# Junk given new life at Sanitary Disposal

By **JADE McDOWELL**  
Staff Writer

One man’s trash becomes another man’s new hubcaps in the recycling industry.

Every day at the Sanitary Disposal transfer station outside Hermiston people add to the piles of broken, bulky 1990-era televisions and empty wine bottles, glad to finally be rid of “that junk in the garage.”

But after drop-off those items take on a new life. Stripped down to their components, separated by material and compressed into bales, recyclable objects will eventually re-enter the economy as fodder for everything from steel beams to egg cartons.

“It gets it out of the waste stream, which just makes dollars and sense,” said Bill Kik, maintenance supervisor for Sanitary Disposal.

Late last week, dozens of old refrigerators were stacked in the middle of the yard, evidence of all the area residents who got new appliances for Christmas. The freon will be removed from them and the metal “guts” will be salvaged for scrap metal.

The transfer station doesn’t recycle the materials onsite, but rather collects and processes them for shipping to various recyclers like Clayton Ward Recycling in Kennewick (plastics) and RS Davis Recycling in Hermiston (metals), which turn them back into raw materials that can be sold to manufacturers in the United States and abroad.

“That’s a market that we sometimes have to play,” Kik said, noting that a few years ago the value of cardboard plummeted for a while thanks to market forces in China, where much of America’s recycled cardboard eventually ends up. “A lot of places don’t have the ability to stockpile for long, but we have acres we can put it on.”

Sanitary Disposal doesn’t have a compost heap, but it does transfer food waste from customers like Wal-Mart to Pendleton Sanitary for that purpose.

Non-recyclable garbage is pushed into trailers bound for the Finley Buttes Landfill near Boardman, but Sanitary Disposal employees are inventive in using even “garbage” one last time. Old mattresses are folded in half by the claw of the excavator and used to sweep rubbish from the platform.

“We use them as our brooms,” Kik said. “It keeps the floor nice and clean.”



Metal household appliances are separated and await being salvaged for scrap metal at the Sanitary Disposal facility Friday outside of Hermiston.

STAFF PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS

Recyclables are sorted using various techniques. The public might not differentiate between tin cans and aluminum cans, for example, but if employees put a load of cans in the industrial wood chipper, the same magnet that pulls nails from the wood chips also pulls out the tinned steel cans from the aluminum ones, which are not magnetic.

A big question Sanitary Disposal gets is why the city of Hermiston doesn’t do a curbside recycling program where residents could have their recyclables picked up instead of taking them to the transfer station. The city did study the issue in 2014, but based on interest surveys and cost analysis, determined that curbside recycling would double Sanitary Disposal’s labor costs while only increasing recycling rates by about 2 percent, which would not allow the transfer station to recoup the extra money.

“It’s all about volume,” Kik said. “It would have to be a mandatory thing, and I’ve never been a guy who likes mandatory things.”

Gina Miller, code enforcement officer for Umatilla County, said the Department of Environmental Quality monitors the amount of recycling that happens in each county and sets goals for them based on population density and other factors. Umatilla County’s goal is to recycle 20 percent of all solid waste, but Miller said the county has consistently surpassed that goal by 10 percent or more every year.

Recycling saves irreplaceable resources, saves energy, saves room in landfills and provides cheaper materials for manufacturers, so Miller said her office is trying to get people to recycle more as they clean up their properties. Last year the county got a grant to run a hazardous waste collection event and Miller said she is always happy to give people information

about ways to recycle and compost.

“We’re trying to extend more awareness and education,” she said. “It just has not been a part of our culture.”

Kik said there is definitely more work to be done to help people be better about reusing, re-gifting and recycling.

“A lot of the stuff that gets thrown away you just shake your head and ask why,” he said.

Each transfer station reports to the DEQ how many tons of each material were processed and to which recycling companies they were sent. In 2015, Sanitary Disposal reported it collected about 11,800 tons of material plus 2,370 gallons of used motor oil (bottles and cans returned to the Bottle-Drop Center for a deposit are not handled by Sanitary Disposal). Kik said the amounts don’t change too much from year to year — most people are pretty consistent with the amount of waste they produce.

Currently, Hermiston residents can drop off their recycling at the transfer station, 81144 N. Highway 395, or the recycling center at 22 W. Harper Road. Kik said Sanitary Disposal is still looking for someone willing to let them put recycling containers on property somewhere else in town to replace the former station on Orchard Avenue that was pushed out by the expansion of the current Hermiston School District building.

He said he’s glad residents are using the stations, although there is “a little bit of laziness” on some people’s part about not flattening boxes or dumping things in the wrong containers.

When the big metal recycling containers get too beat up, they get sent to Sanitary Disposal one last time, where they are processed as scrap metal and sent to be recycled.

Contact Jade McDowell at 541-564-4536.

# Homeless camp clean-up tops two tons

By **PHIL WRIGHT**  
Staff Writer

Umatilla County authorities cleaned up another transient camp and threw out more than two tons of materials last week.

Undersheriff Jim Littlefield said the camp was on the banks of the Umatilla River adjacent to Old River Road, about half a mile south of the homeless camp the sheriff’s office cleared out in early March. He said the sheriff’s office at that time heard rumors of a second camp in the area, but citizen complaints did not start rolling in about the site until August and September.

The agency found the camp spread across Oregon Department of Transportation property, county property and “a sliver of private property,” Littlefield said. The site had about six regulars unlawfully living in tents and a small recreational trailer. Deputies trespassed people from the site and made several arrests there, Littlefield said, primarily on warrants.

Littlefield also said the sheriff’s office checked the camp periodically and found everyone abandoned the camp by late November or early December, but they left behind



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED BY UMATILLA COUNTY SHERIFF’S OFFICE

Umatilla County law enforcement and planning department, with the help of Sanitary Disposal Inc. of Hermiston, cleaned out property Thursday along the banks of the Umatilla River on River Road where campers were unlawfully residing in tents and a small trailer.

hind the trailer and a lot of waste and debris.

The sheriff’s office worked with the planning department’s code enforcement arm and with the community justice department to remove the garbage on Thursday and teamed up with Sanitary Disposal Inc. of Hermiston, which provided a large commercial dumpster.

The dirty work of putting camp items into the dumpster fell to community justice work crews, which consist of local offenders making good on

community service hours as part of their probation. Littlefield said cleaning up the camp was another example of the fine work the crews do.

Staff at Sanitary Disposal reported the trash came to 4,280 pounds, not including the trailer, which a tow truck hauled off. Littlefield said the garbage filled the dumpster, but the amount was surprising.

The sheriff’s office planned to clean up the camp at the start of December, but Littlefield said winter storms delayed the work.

# No one injured in Madison farm fire

By **JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN**  
East Oregonian

No one was injured in a blaze that destroyed a large storage building at Madison Ranches in an early morning fire Saturday.

The Echo Volunteer Fire Department got the call at 6:09 a.m., and sent 10 crew members out to the site, three engines and two water tenders. Members of the Umatilla Fire District 1, as well as crews from other departments in both Umatilla and Morrow counties, assisted them.

The building that burned was located near the junction of Highway 207 and Oregon Trail Road about 9 miles west-southwest of Echo and about 11 miles south of Hermiston.

Echo Fire Chief Delbert Gehrke said he doesn’t suspect any foul play in the start of the fire.

“Some type of ceiling-mounted electric heater — that’s what we’re guessing,” he said.

Gehrke said it took crews about two and a half hours to get the flames under control.

Jake Madison of Madison Ranches said the building was not salvageable and will have to be replaced.

“A portion of our storage building was burned,” he said. “It was pretty substantial. It made a steel building melt down. Probably a 60-by-60 (square foot) piece of the building was lost.”

Madison said the cause of the fire is still under investigation, and he doesn’t know yet what the cost in damages will be, but he was relieved no one was injured.

“It could have been much worse,” he said. “We’re very grateful for the quick response from



COURTESY UMATILLA COUNTY FIRE DISTRICT 1

Flames are visible glowing through the metal siding of a storage building on Madison Ranches south of Hermiston on Saturday morning. Firefighters from Umatilla County Fire District 1, along with units from other Umatilla and Morrow County fire agencies were called for mutual aid to assist Echo Fire Department with the New Year’s Eve blaze.

all the fire departments, from both Umatilla and Morrow counties.”

Contact Jayati Ramakrishnan at jramakrishnan@hermistonherald.com or 541-564-4534.

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