

Reduce, Reuse, Recycle – Close the Resource Loop

“Action Item #10 in the Mayors’ Climate Protection Agreement: Increase recycling rates in City operations and in the community”

The UN’s latest climate change report points out that *“Waste minimization and recycling provide important indirect mitigation benefits through the conservation of energy and materials.”*

Recycling conserves resources by giving materials new life rather than burying them in a landfill, and avoids the energy use and pollution of extracting raw materials from the Earth. So here is yet another simple way that you and I have some control over the well-being of the planet. The more each person participates, the more we can make a difference together.

As a nation, we’re making progress. Here are some hopeful statistics from the Environmental Protection Agency: currently this country recycles 32 percent of its waste - nearly double the rate of 15 years ago. □ We recycle 50 percent of all paper, 34 percent of all plastic soft drink bottles, 45 percent of all aluminum beer and soft drink cans, 63 percent of all steel packaging, and 67 percent of all major appliances.

The first two steps are to reduce the packaging we consume, and to reuse whatever we can. But what can we do in Alliance to increase our recycling rates?

It’s all about finding a bin. Cities and colleges who are increasing their rates have replaced the standard trash receptacles in their jurisdictions with units that have one section for trash, and another for recyclables. Or they have placed separate recycling receptacles next to all of their existing trash bins. Many school districts are collecting their recyclable drink containers in bins in their student and teacher lunch rooms. Some are collecting paper as well.

Curbside recycling makes it easy at home. What can go in those yellow curb-side bins? Materials that are accepted: glass bottles and jars; PET 1 and 2 plastic (find the 1 or 2 in a small triangle on the bottom of packages); newspaper, office paper, junk mail (remove plastic and shred for privacy), magazines, catalogues and phone books; cardboard (except cardboard that has a waxed surface); and aluminum or steel cans (no pet-food cans). Take metal lids off of glass bottles and include them with the recycling. Be sure to rinse containers, and remove plastic lids to take to one of the companies that accepts other plastic types. Whatever it is, if it’s greasy, it’s not recyclable. Your bin overfloweth? Ask for another, and it will be given, or mark items clearly “recycling.”

What about all those other plastics - numbers 3 through 7? Until this week, I had been tossing these, unaware that they could have multiple lives. But no more! There are at least two companies in town that will take nearly any type of plastic: Enviropros, which will take hard plastic to reform into plastic lumber, and the Alliance Recycling Center, which will take plastic of any variety (hard, soft, bags, films, nearly anything as long as it’s clean). Plastic grocery bags can also be recycled at Giant Eagle.

So should we throw away the rest? Where exactly is “away” on our shrinking planet Earth? The troubles at the Countywide landfill, and the presence of the new Mahoning County landfill in our backyard should bring this issue home to us.

Sustainable living requires that we change our thinking about how we deal with “used” materials. Rather than viewing it as “waste,” we need to see it as a resource. Really, nearly everything that goes through our households can now be recycled in some way.

Useable or repairable household goods and furniture? Donate them to Goodwill. Useable old tub, kitchen sink, or windows or doors? Buckeye Wrecking, the Habitat Restore or the Canton Stockpile may be able to use or sell them. An old building? There are people who will deconstruct it for its parts.

Food scraps? Consider composting or vermiculture (more on this later!). Your garden will love the results, and it’s easier (and less smelly) than you think. Many colleges are now composting their dining hall scraps, and mulching their grounds with the product. Yard waste? Compost it, or take it to one of many yard waste drop-off sites offered by local Counties, where it will be composted or chipped into mulch.

Technology? Keep Alliance Beautiful now has envelopes for mailing old cell phones for recycling – you can find them at the library or City Hall. Other electronics can be dropped off at the Smith Township Recycling Center, where they will be refurbished or recycled for their parts. Check the County websites for other locations.

Of course, batteries, fluorescent bulbs, and other hazardous wastes should always be dropped off at hazardous waste collection sites. Chemicals, such as the mercury in the fluorescent bulbs, will be safely reclaimed for future use.

Recycling acknowledges that there is no “away,” and helps to protect our environment and conserve resources. This is an easy step we can all take to make a difference. Don’t let useful materials get dead-ended. Let’s recycle - and buy recycled products to close the resource loop.

*"You must be the change you wish to see in the world."
— Mahatma Gandhi*

Check it Out:

U.S. EPA Recycling website: <http://www.epa.gov/msw/recycle.htm>

For recycling in Alliance contact J & J Refuse: 330-823-8155
or Mona Henderson, at Keep Alliance Beautiful: 330-823-3254

Stark-Tusc.-Wayne Joint Solid Waste Management Dist. – (see their “Stop junk mail” links, yard waste drop-off locations, and composting info): <http://www.timetorecycle.org/recycling/>

Mahoning County “Green Team” Recycling department (how to recycle nearly anything!):
<http://www.mahoningcountyoh.gov/>

Smith Township Recycling Center accepts electronics: Township Building, 846 N. Johnson Rd.
Tue and Thu, 10 AM–5 PM, Saturdays, 9 AM–1 PM

Alliance Recycling Center accepts paper, any type of hard or soft plastic (including plastic wrap, bags, and vinyl siding), metals, cardboard and more: 15969 River St. NE, Lexington Township
330-821-8057

Enviro-Pros accepts any type of clean, hard plastic (no wrap or bags, please), including things like hard clear packaging, plastic or Rubbermaid furniture, vinyl siding, Little Tykes type toys that are beyond repair, etc.: 15642 Armour St. NE, 330-821-3870

Sunpro, in North Canton, handles hazardous wastes, and recycles used fluorescent and HID light bulbs for businesses and industries for a fee: 330-966-0910

Building de-construction, re-construction and salvage: Tom Adams
<http://www.woodworksworld.com/index.html>