

## RECYCLING MYTHS BUSTED!

### **RECYCLING MYTH: Recycling is hard.**

As long as the community is able to provide adequate recycling opportunities and accessibility, recycling should not be difficult for the consumer. Providing bins and visuals in the community helps residents know what can be recycled. It is now easier than ever. Many communities accept commingled recycling where the material no longer needs to be separated by the individual. Also don't worry about removing labels and caps – they are removed by machines during the separation process.

### **RECYCLING MYTH: Material placed in a landfill will decompose.**

Landfills are designed so that little oxygen or moisture flows through - two essential components of decomposition. Landfills are not meant to break down trash, but rather to bury it. This design helps prevent decomposing materials from contaminating groundwater. Thus recycling creates more space in landfills and lessens the chance of trash leeching into our soil and water.

### **RECYCLING MYTH: Recycling just becomes trash.**

Here is EPA's response:

While it is true that contamination can render some materials unfit for recycling (such as food residue on paper products), recycling corporations work hard to find markets for materials that are recycled. With new technology to separate and salvage materials and emerging markets for these materials, recyclers often find it feasible to partner with their end users to identify opportunities for reuse. Some materials will eventually find their way to the landfill or incinerator simply because they should not have been recycled in the first place. Educating consumers about what can and cannot be recycled will help in reducing the amount of materials that eventually must be disposed as waste.

### **RECYCLING MYTH: Any plastic product that has a number within the chasing arrows is recyclable.**

The plastics industry created the resin identification code in 1988 to differentiate the different plastic polymer types. The code includes the recycling symbol along with a number that identifies the type of resin used. Contrary to public belief, the code on a plastic product does not mean that material is recyclable or has been recycled. It has no other meaning aside from identifying the type of plastic.

### **RECYCLING MYTH: Recycled bottles are just made into new bottles.**

Here is EPA's response:

Recycled materials are reprocessed and turned into a variety of new products. Recycled plastics are used in the production of toothbrushes, plastic construction timber and carpets, to name a few. Recycling allows for greater innovation when it comes to the manufacturing of new products.

*Statistical Sources for the following myths came from NRC's Environmental Benefits Calculator, NRC's Recycling Economic Information Study, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Steel Recycling Institute, American Forest & Paper Association, BioCycle Magazine, Resource Recycling Magazine, American Plastics Council, Glass Packaging Institute, Aluminum Association, and WorldWatch Institute unless otherwise noted.*

### **RECYCLING MYTH: There are no markets for recyclables.**

Here is the National Recycling Coalition response:

- Demand for recycled materials has never been greater and, in many cases, exceeds the supply currently provided by the American public.
- Rapid industrial development, particularly in China and other Asian nations, has created a huge surge in demand for recyclables.
- Domestic and international markets exist for all materials collected in curbside recycling programs, as long as they meet basic quality standards. In fact, there is intense competition among users for many recycled materials.
- The recycling industry is comparable in size to the auto and truck manufacturing industry. It's a large industry that demands lots of raw materials.
- A recycled aluminum beverage can returns to the grocer's shelf as a new, filled can in as few as 60 days after collection, which tells us that the markets are functioning efficiently.

### **RECYCLING MYTH: There is plenty of landfill space, so why bother. Also, landfills are safe disposal options.**

Here is the National Recycling Coalition response:

- Recycling's true value comes from preventing pollution and saving natural resources and energy, not landfill space.
- Recycling is largely responsible for averting the landfill crises.
- The number of landfills in the United States is steadily decreasing - from 8,000 in 1988 to 1,858 in 2001. The capacity, however, has remained relatively constant. New landfills are much larger than in the past.
- Landfills can be major sources of groundwater pollution. For example, leachate from solid waste landfills is similar in composition to that of hazardous waste landfills.
- Municipal solid waste landfills are the largest source of human-related methane emissions in the United States, accounting for about 34% of these emissions, which are a potent cause of global warming.

**RECYCLING MYTH: Recycling should pay for itself. If recycling made sense, the free market will make it happen.**

Here is the National Recycling Coalition response:

- Recycling pays for itself in many ways, from the direct financial benefits of selling the materials to the many economic and environmental benefits.
- Recycling creates 1.1 million U.S. jobs, \$236 billion in gross annual sales and \$37 billion in annual payrolls. Recycling creates four jobs for every one job created in the waste management and disposal industries.
- Public sector investment in local recycling programs pays great dividends by creating private sector jobs. For every job collecting recyclables, 26 jobs are created to process the materials and manufacture them into new products.
- Landfills and incinerators don't pay for themselves; in fact they cost more than recycling programs. Government supports lots of services that the free market wouldn't provide, such as the delivery of running water and electricity.
- If the market were truly free, long-standing subsidiaries that favor virgin materials and landfills would not exist, and recycling could compete on a level playing field.
- Thousands of U.S. companies have saved millions of dollars through their voluntary recycling programs. They wouldn't recycle if it didn't make economic sense.

**RECYCLING MYTH: We are already recycling as much as we can.**

In N.C. we are trying to reach 2 Million Tons by 2012. This refers to achieving an annual rate of two million tons of recycling through municipal and county recycling programs. The annual rate of recycling reported for fiscal year 2006-07 rose to a new record of 1.35 million tons. To reach two million tons of annual recovery by 2012, local government recycling programs would need to increase their performance by 48 percent from the July 1, 2007, baseline, which represents about a 10 percent improvement per year.

Here is the National Recycling Coalition response:

- The national recycling rate is about 30%. U.S. EPA has set a goal of 35%.
- Many easily recycled materials are still thrown away. For example, 78% of glass containers, 60% of aluminum cans, 41% of steel cans, 45% of paper and paperboard containers and packaging are not currently recycled.
- Many Americans focus on recycling in the kitchen, but forget about products and packaging consumed elsewhere, like bathrooms, laundry rooms and garages.
- Americans are increasingly on the go, and we can do much more to make recycling convenient in public places, from downtown streets to shopping malls and sports stadiums.
- We are nowhere near our potential, especially if manufacturers make products easier to recycle.

**RECYCLING MYTH: Recycling causes more pollution than it prevents.**

Here is the National Recycling Coalition response:

- Recycling helps reduce our reliance on foreign oil by saving energy.
- A national recycling rate of 30% reduces greenhouse gas emissions as much as removing nearly 25 million cars from the road.
- In 2007, recycling is conservatively projected to save the **same** amount of energy used in 9 million homes (900 trillion BTUs).
- Brutal wars over natural resources, including timber and minerals, have killed or displaced more than 20 million people and are raising at least \$12 billion a year for rebels, warlords and repressive governments. Recycling eases the demand for the resources.
- In the U.S., processing minerals contributes almost half of all reported toxic emissions from industry, sending 1.5 million tons of pollution into the air and water each year. Recycling can significantly reduce these emissions.
- It takes 95% less energy to recycle aluminum than it does to make it from raw materials. Making recycled steel saves 60%, recycled newspaper 40%, recycled plastics 70% and recycled glass 40%. These savings far outweigh the energy created as byproducts of incineration and landfilling.
- Mining is the world's most deadly occupation. On average, 40 mine workers are killed on the job each day, and many more are injured. Recycling reduces the need for mining.
- Tree farms and reclaimed mines are not ecologically equivalent to natural forests and ecosystems. Recycling prevents habitat destruction, loss of biodiversity, and soil erosion associated with logging and mining.