

RECYCLING NEWS, SPRING 2009

Tercentennial news. It's a new year, with a new president and congress, and big things coming up locally, too. On July 17, Truro becomes 300 years old, and celebrations will start in the spring and last much of the year. For our part in it, the Recycling Committee is teaming up with the Center for the Arts at Castle Hill to stimulate a festival of making sculptures out of used things that would otherwise be recycled/reused in more conventional ways via the recycling center and Swap Shop.

Keep on recycling! Because of the economic recession, threatening to worsen into a world-wide depression, the recently-thriving junk or scrap business has fallen into hard times like most others. In its modern incarnation as the recycling trade, it has been the subject of much recent attention in the media, with a number of unfortunate results. For one thing, it is false that vendors will no longer pay anything for any kind of discarded material; some still yield income, though it has fallen. Worse, however, the widespread reports of how the market's plunge has made recycling no longer lucrative often give the reporters the mistaken impression that it has now become expensive. So expensive, some say, that towns and cities must give up the entire attempt to separate recyclables from worthless trash in order not to lose money!

The fact is that towns like Truro must pay more to dispose of their trash by sending it to SEMASS than to get rid of it any other way. That is true even when former buyers of some recyclables now charge a fee to accept them; the net cost to a town is still less than we must pay if we must truck it to SEMASS, the firm in southeastern Massachusetts that incinerates waste, using the resulting heat to generate electricity. In addition to the cost of hauling, it charges a "tipping" fee just to take our debris off our hands. Moreover, in just a few years, that fee will rise significantly and painfully.

More specifically, Integrated Paper, the firm that takes most of our recyclables, now charges \$40/ton to take away plastic, glass, and metal cans, but they still pay us for our paper. The net cost is therefore considerably less than sending it to SEMASS, even if to do so were not illegal—which it is! So we have no legal option to sticking with Integrated Paper, which offers us a better deal anyway.

The bottom line is, therefore, that we must continue to recycle as diligently as ever, at the least. It will help our town's hard-pressed budget at a time when revenues are falling faster than costs if we can redouble our efforts to separate out and save everything that can be reused, reclaimed, or revived into new usefulness. Lots of recyclable paper, cardboard, glass, plastics, and metals are still thoughtlessly (or lazily?) dropped into the hopper every day. Plus much organic waste that could better be composted; see below.

Don't forget the other benefits from recycling, also, even though they do not have an immediately felt effect on our budget. Incineration gives rise to several forms of pollution, with seriously harmful consequences. First, a lot of carbon dioxide goes up the stack, continually adding to global warming. Less well known is the fact that the high temperatures reached in that combustion cause some of the air's nitrogen to combine with oxygen, producing an even more potent greenhouse gas. Then, the gases given off contain several kinds of environmental poisons, from furans and dioxins to vaporized heavy metals including mercury and lead. Though widely dispersed, that noxious stuff steadily accumulates in our lands and waters, and gets into our food supply. Many people also don't know that from a quarter to a third of the original material is left behind as ash and clinker, a hazardous waste that must be sent to carefully lined landfills where it doesn't lose any volume as it ages. Finally, recycling supports several growing businesses and industries, which transport and process waste

materials to make new paper, plastics, glass, and metals. Besides providing work and livelihood for many people, they contribute in a different way to the great task of climate control: recovering the raw materials uses significantly less energy than it takes to get them from virgin sources, hence with less contribution to global warming.

Compost more, too. To compost kitchen and yard wastes is a kind of recycling, too, even though nature does all of the transformative work. Some people still throw into the garbage perfectly good leftovers of food rather than be “bothered” to save and eat them later. Good cooks find creative ways to transform uneaten remnants into delicious snacks and meals; if you haven’t thought it worth the trouble, many cookbooks will tell you how, saving money, resources, and ultimately (even if in a small way) our planet. Little actions of this kind, when they become widespread, add up to big effects.

But that is reuse, not yet composting. All organic (that is, carbon-containing) materials ultimately break down into simpler forms, which plants can then use as their food. Rot happens; composting is just helping and harnessing it, with the aid of critters like earthworms and beneficial bugs and bacteria of various kinds. There are many ways to do it, some simple and cheap, others more convenient and more expensive. If you haven’t tried it, the process may look formidable and off-putting, but lots of help is easily available. Much of it is a few keystrokes away on the internet; simple brochures may be had for the asking or taking at our transfer station. Very little yard space is needed, and the result—itself called compost—is a valuable addition to soil. Besides its fertilizing value, it helps our sandy Truro soils hold water and provides soil-building tilth.

As a last resort, if you have limited space for it, there is a place at the dump for stuff like stalks, twigs, branches, and dry leaves, which breaks down more slowly than kitchen waste and grass clippings. Ask at the hut by the hopper.

Paper Recycling. The state DEP is currently running a campaign to step up the recycling of paper, so let’s make a special effort to help. Remember, it’s the one recyclable for which we get money rather than having to pay. Put all kinds of **clean** paper products into the paper shack, including corrugated cardboard. Our vendor accepts for recycling those familiar coated paper boxes of juice, milk, lemonade, etc., the kind that have plastic spouts with screw-on lids. Remember to rinse and flatten them, though. (The ones you can open only by squeezing a fold still go into the hopper.) Just put them into a paper bag along with your other odd bits of clean paper like junk mail, discarded files & folders, index cards, flattened boxes of any kind, post-it notes, calendars, catalogs, envelopes (plastic windows or labels are OK), tickets, greeting cards, phone books, even spiral notebooks! No need to remove staples, either.

Notice, also, that the Truro Post Offices recycle junk mail and other waste paper received in your mailbox. They had to quit for a while because of a false accusation that PO workers were throwing mail into the recycling instead of putting it in boxes. Therefore, please follow the rules: when discarding any first-class mail, be sure to open it first, and don’t take paper from elsewhere there to recycle—take it to the Transfer Station! And notice, please, that recyclable, clean paper goes into the blue plastic containers only; the gray one is for real trash which of course doesn’t get recycled.

On *Earth Day*, Wed. April 22, from 9 to 12 in the morning, you can contribute to paper recycling and at the same time safely dispose of sensitive personal paper documents, which you may be reluctant just to put into the paper shack. Thanks to the cooperation of Cape & Islands Shredding Service, Truro householders can bring up to two cartons full of such materials which you wish to keep

private, for secure destruction on the spot and guaranteed 100% recycling. This second annual event is NOT open to businesses or any commercial enterprise, even a home business. Such customers should directly contact CISS for the shredding service.

Plastics Recycling. By special arrangement with a vendor that accepts much of our recycling, Truro accepts for recycling **all** numbered plastics! They are no longer limited to small-mouthed bottles and jars, either: clear plastic (#1) egg cartons are OK; ditto black (#5) take-out dishes, etc. You can put all types together, and they get sorted by a big machine that can read the numbers in the little triangle of chasing arrows. Pretty amazing, and helpful too. No grocery bags, styrofoam cups, or other forms of plastic film or foam, though; all kinds of plastic bags go back to the stores.

One other caveat about plastic recycling: Most medicines come in little plastic bottles these days, and those almost always are numbered indicating that they can be recycled. Before you bring them, empty the drugs themselves into a container in which you can save them until the next hazardous waste collection day. Then, to protect yourself and prevent illegal drug taking, remove labels that contain your name or refill instructions. The safest thing is to take off and destroy the label of any prescription drug, and then put the *empty* plastic or glass bottle in with the rest of your recyclable plastics. We hope to be able to develop an easier method someday. See below for another point about old drugs.

There are no other changes in the rules. No need to separate glass bottles by color, for example. We take all of them, even the formerly forbidden blue and those with plastic labels. Notice, also, that you can still bring glass deposit bottles. If they are all of one brand and in a box or 6-pack, they may be put in the trailer by the COA's shack; otherwise, please put them in the wooden box near the table for the other glass bottles. You can redeem them yourself at most supermarkets, and are welcome to take from the box as well as add to it.

Plastic Bags. It's easy to recycle them at just about any supermarket. For example, Shaws and Stop & Shop in Orleans and P'town take them gladly. A web site www.recycleplasticbags.com devoted to recycling plastic bags has interesting news: Various kinds of plastic bags that many of us have been throwing away *can* and should go to supermarkets for recycling! Here they are:

- Plastic grocery bags
- Plastic retail bags, with string ties and rigid plastic handles *removed*
- Plastic newspaper bags (e.g., Boston Globe, Cape Cod Times)
- Plastic dry cleaning bags
- Plastic produce bags and bread bags with ALL food residue removed
- Plastic wrap from paper products (paper towels, etc.)
- Plastic stretch/shrink wrap (Saran, Cling wrap, etc.)

But Note: all material must be clean and dry! Plus, *DON'T TRY TO RECYCLE these:*

- Plastic bags with strings or rigid plastic handles
- Plastic bags containing food residue
- Plastic soil or mulch bags (no black plastic!)
- Plastic zipper-closed bags
- Plastic bubble wrap (but air-filled plastic pillows for packing *are OK* if popped first)
- Wet plastic bags of any kind

And, of course, don't try to recycle plastic bottles or plastic food containers at supermarkets; bring

them to the dump after rinsing them.

Plastic Cards. Gift cards, promotional cards, ID cards, signs, point of purchase displays, membership cards, hotel cardkeys, bookmarks, rulers, hang tags, drivers licenses, circle calculators, playing cards, luggage tags, and specialty advertising cards are generally made of one of the worst plastics, PVC (polyvinyl chloride). Though they are not poisonous in your hip pocket or purse, they are made from toxic materials that are hard on factory workers and they give off bad poisons when they burn—a good reason never to put vinyl siding on a wooden house. But how to dispose of old outdated cards? Though small, there are millions of them discarded every year, and they should not be incinerated. Happily, a company announces that they know how to recycle them into sheets of plastic that can be made into cards, then recycled again indefinitely (www.earthworkssystem.com). Just cut them up, put the pieces in an envelope, seal securely, and mail to Earthworks c/o Halprin Ind., 25840 Miles Rd., Solon, OH 44146. But what about credit cards? True, they are made of the same stuff, and you could send outdate and otherwise unwanted ones there, but you should take special care to make sure your card number and signature on the back are completely destroyed or illegible before sending.

Old cars. Along with smaller things made of metal, automobiles are eminently recyclable. There is in fact a big business centering on collecting, compacting, shredding, and recycling them. Last fall, an article in our sister publication, *Truro Tidelines*, told how to take advantage of that fact, with profit to yourself and to our Council on Aging. Inform the owner of the car, if locatable, that it has value and should be recycled by calling the Council on Aging (508-487-2462) and speak to Cheryl Grenier. She will make all arrangements to have the hunk hauled away with cash benefit to the COA and/or owner. If the car is truly abandoned and you can't find the owner, call Ms. Grenier yourself.

Used cooking oil. Keeping up with the times, our recycling center takes vegetable oil you no longer want (e.g., it has been used in a fryer, even one of the big turkey fryers; or even if it is old and starting to smell rancid). Bring it—a gallon or more—in a sealed or capped container, and give it to one of the attendants. They will get it to some locals who have diesel cars with engines modified to run on this kind of biodiesel. Wave of the future!

Rechargeable and button batteries. You don't have to separate these, either; you can bring all little batteries together in one bag or box. The guys at the Transfer Station know what to do with each type and don't mind sorting them. Pretty nice, eh? If you aren't familiar with the term, 'button batteries' include those little flat ones from hearing aids, cameras, and other small electronic gadgets. The ordinary kind for flashlights, toys, etc. marked in capital letters: A, B, etc. still go into the trash hopper. They are no longer hazardous or valuable.

Other news about batteries: Instead of shelling out the money for a battery charger, consumers can use the existing ports on their laptops or desktops, video games, and increasingly, televisions and monitors, to power up certain batteries. While the USBCELL charges fully in about five hours, a half-hour blast will buy you hours of extra life. They are rated to last for 500 charges, so the price tag (at www.moxia.com currently \$17.50 per pair, with no charger needed) seems modest compared to even the cheapest disposable alkaline.

In terms of environmental impact, these NiMH batteries do not contain cadmium, which is toxic to humans and wildlife. Also, as their website explains, each USBCELL battery can save 7

kilograms (kg) of CO₂ and 3kg of toxic waste, when you factor in the production and disposal of the batteries they replace. The numbers may not seem significant, until you begin to multiply them by the billions of batteries we purchase each year. Best of all, the USBCELL batteries are recyclable, and can be returned to Moixa for recycling, free of charge.

Moixa is also planning to release AAA, C, D and 9V batteries, as well as lines for cameras, PDAs and other portable devices. While they are only available online right now, they allegedly will be arriving in stores in the U.S. soon. You can also go on Moixa's site (www.usbcell.com) to sign up to receive email alerts for when these products are available.

Old CDs and DVDs; Electronics. Inconspicuously, Truro now collects and recycles unwanted old CDs and DVDs. If they are playable music, put them into the Swap Shop. We have found a way to get the no-good ones recycled, so please DO NOT throw those little discs into the hopper! You don't have to take them out of the "jewel boxes," either. Just give them to one of the dump guys or gals.

Remember, too, that old electronic equipment contains lots of toxic materials and should never be tossed into the trash. There is a bill under consideration in the Mass. legislature to require manufacturers to take back, free of extra charge, all computers, TVs, VCRs, iPods, transistor radios, etc. when consumers are through with them. It will help if you will let our representative, Sarah Peake, and senator Rob O'Leary (who are in favor) know that you want to see positive action on this forward-looking, producer-take-back legislation. If passed, producers and sellers will finance the collection and recycling of such goods. We will no longer have to pay \$10 or more per item to get rid of them, and less scrupulous folks won't be tempted to throw them into the woods. Until the Carron-Joyce Computer Take Back bill is passed, you can continue to bring used electronic equipment to the transfer station, but we have to charge you what it costs the town to recycle them. Six TV companies—Sony, Samsung, LG, Panasonic, Sharp, and Toshiba—are offering national take-back programs; check their web sites. If you have a TV made by another manufacturer and are planning to replace it by a new digital one, give the maker a hard time for being left behind by the big six. If enough people complain, you may save money and prevent environmental pollution.

An even more comprehensive electronic waste bill, H-4764, *An Act to Require Producer Responsibility for the Collection and Recycling of Discarded Electronic Equipment*, is also being considered at the State House. This legislation covers the proper recycling, by their producers, of computers (desktop and laptop), televisions (flat panel and CRT), printers, scanners, and other peripherals. Additionally, the legislation requires stronger labor and environmental standards for recycling, which would help eliminate the devastating practice of exporting our old junk to developing countries and dumping on the world's poor. Either or both deserve our support.

An On-line Swap Shop. Meanwhile, you can dispose of any equipment that still works via Freecycle Cape Cod, which is the on-line equivalent of the Swap Shop, with the advantage that it never closes: http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Freecycle_Cape_Cod/. Check it out; join (there are now over 2,000 Cape members), and learn the details of how it works. Once you become a member (that's free too), you get an email about once a day listing all the stuff that other Cape folks are offering, with the town where each lives. People do travel considerable distances to pick up free things they want! I have seen computers, electric organs, entire picket fences, loads of manure, and sets of chairs offered and quickly taken, plus of course lots of stuff you can find in our Swap Shop.

Warning: Yellow-Box Scam in Town. Have you seen those big yellow boxes labeled “Planet Aid” around Truro and other Cape towns? They ask for donations of used clothing and shoes to be given to poor people. Don’t fall for it! Planet Aid did start out under a different name as a legitimate charity, but it soon became a money-making scheme which enriched its founder, who is now under indictment for fraud. Though the organization is run by others, it still is badly managed and little of the promised African distribution of the clothes collected takes place. Only 12% of its income was expended on actual charitable work, according to a recent required IRS filing. Do bring used clothing to our Swap Shop or put it into one of the Salvation Army boxes outside, and you can be assured that nobody is making a personal profit from it. If you want to read the full (and quite interesting story) of how an idealistic enterprise turned into a fraud, go to www.tvindalert.com or www.rickross.com/reference/tvind/tvind44.html. An even more comprehensive story was printed last year in the Cape Voice.

What to do with Hazardous Products.

Wellfleet, Truro, Provincetown	Wellfleet Transfer Station 370 Coles Neck Road	9 am-noon	June 6
Truro, Wellfleet and Provincetown	Truro Recycling Center 1 Truro Dump Road, off Route 6	9 am-noon	August 1
Provincetown, Truro and Wellfleet	Provincetown Transfer Station 90 Race Point Road	9 am-noon	October 3

Until the next hazardous household waste collection, this June, keep your hazardous waste stored carefully (in basement, garage, etc.) For several years now, our regional cooperation has been working smoothly. The place rotates among the three towns: Wellfleet first, in June, then Truro in August, and finally P’town. People from all three towns are welcome at any one of them, and it is FREE. Any time you recycle, visit the Swap Shop, or patronize the hopper, you can pick up a flyer listing what you may not dispose of any other way but must save until then. Useful flyers are also available explaining safe ways to get rid of marine and road flares, ammunition, fireworks, and military ordnance, and “household sharps” (see below).

Remember, the traditionally biggest item--leftover oil paint--is collected through the warmer half of the year at our Paint Shack; you can pick up flyers explaining it from dump attendants or in the Swap Shop. Having a Paint Shack saves the Town money, and also extends a helping hand to anyone who wants a small amount of free paint. It is in effect an extension of the Swap Shop: you may leave usable amounts in their cans and/or pick up free paint, varnish, thinners, and the like for your own use. After the first freeze, the Paint Shack closes until the danger of frost is over next spring: May first.

About those sharps: that’s the jargon for used hypodermic needles and lancets. Many diabetics need to give themselves frequent injections, and nondiabetics use them too to take other medications or draw drops of blood for analysis. All users of sharps should have specially designed, safe plastic containers at home. If you need and don’t have such a container, your doctor can give you one or you can pick one up from the Transfer Station. That’s where you take it when it is full of old needles and the like.

Dispose of drugs responsibly! Right now, there is no way to recycle surplus drugs/medications, even if they are perfectly good. We're working on it. Meanwhile, above all DON'T POLLUTE OUR DRINKING WATER BY FLUSHING DRUGS DOWN THE TOILET OR SINK! This handy but terrible way to get rid of medicines you don't want or need to keep is a bad mistake. No matter how good your Title 5 septic system may be, anything water soluble (as most orally taken drugs are) goes right through the system into a leaching field and down to the water table, our 'sole-source aquifer' from which we take all our water for drinking and cooking. Filtering the effluent through many feet of sand helps a little for some chemicals, and when the stuff gets to the underlying ground water from which our wells draw it is diluted. But when you keep drinking water with even trace amounts of drugs, they may build up in your body and cause trouble. *The younger your children, the more they are affected by tiny amounts of pollutants.* Now you know; so don't do it again. (Sorry for the scolding tone, but this is serious.)

Instead, collect your outdated or unneeded pills and capsules in a single container, and pour liquid medicines together into one big bottle. Save them for the next hazardous waste collection day. You can recycle the containers, but further cautions apply! You have to look out for identity theft, because some containers for prescriptions contain sensitive personal information, and for illegal drug pushers or takers, who can sometimes make use of the refill data. Therefore, remove and destroy labels unless you are sure they have no such information before putting the glass bottles with glass and the plastic ones on the other table. It is best to put little pill bottles into larger containers of the same kind of plastic; otherwise, they sometimes fall through cracks and holes in some recycling machines.

Switch to Green Electricity. One of the biggest ways you can do something positive about the climate change crisis that is creeping up on us is to take advantage of Cape Light Compact's offer of electricity generated from renewable sources. You pay very slightly more for it, but if you also start cutting down on your use of electricity in some of the ways suggested in *120 Ways You Can Combat Climate Change* (downloadable from the Energy Committee's web page or from www.truroenergy.org) that will more than make up the difference. Besides, for every extra dollar you pay for *Cape Light Compact Green* electricity, the Massachusetts Renewable Energy Trust matches, dollar for dollar, your investment in clean electricity back to the town or city in which you reside? To learn more about it, go to www.capelightcompact.org and on the left, click on 'power supply.'

That's it, for now. But watch for the latest edition of Truro Tidelines in your mailbox!

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