

WASTE BYTES!

Newsletter of the Maine State Planning Office, Waste Management and Recycling Program



State Planning Office To Move

At one time, one might have asked: “Who is moving where?” This is a little different though. For the first time since the “unsettling 90’s”, the SPO will have all of its programs under one roof. Sometime after Labor Day the State Planning Office, including the Waste Management and Recycling Program, will take up residence at 19 Union Street in Augusta, near the new YMCA, in the former quarters of the Maine Department of Labor. (see photo below) The second floor will house State Audit and the Human Rights Commission. The third floor will bring together everyone from 184, 187, and 189 State Street – the State Planning Office. The first floor is half above ground/half below ground and will be used for storage and related activities.



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The Year of Composting ?

It was mid June and the Maine Compost School was in session. Enrollment was again near the 20 limit. But outside the school, there was a sense of recognition that organics management had returned to the table for discussion (forgive the pun!).

After the Food Waste Symposium was held in 2004 at Bowdoin College, composting in Maine was energized for a few years – even home composting bin sales took off. The Sandy River Recycling Pilot composting project was started. But after a bit, interest seemed to wane. But there is optimism in the air that once more that composting in Maine might be witnessing a second awakening.

This time composting has found a new landing pad - the schools of Maine. It is not to say that schools have not been involved for some time; however the interest is back and it is beyond the classroom. Students seem to embrace composting the most, however, when they get a hand’s on approach, rather than simply reading about composting in a textbook. For size and convenience, many schools adopted an interest in vermiculture – worm farming. This created some opportunities for guest speakers as well. With the popularity of compost bins, a few teachers took the lessons outside with what they hoped would be found in most homes. *Continued on Page 2*

'First Use' Bags and Reusable Bags

For many people, the question of reusable bags is not news but has been with them since “paper, cloth, or plastic” was played in the schools. The accompanying issue this time around concerns not how many trees will fall for their grocery bag, but rather that the plastic bags have not only become taken for granted but are also lost from the recycling scene. The initial project wanted to not only promote and make more readily available the reusable bags but also to reeducate the public on how, where, and why they should recycle their plastic bags. The reduction goal established for the ‘first use’ plastic shopping bags is a 33% reduction in the number of plastic bags used, by the year 2013. While the retail store supported state-wide campaign includes the collection and recycling of the used but now unwanted plastic shopping bags - - but maintains the overlying directive to achieve the reduction in use of the bags.

During the short time that this movement has been in place, a good deal of education and the raising of awareness have already taken place. Plastic shopping bags are more often referred to as “first use” bags, since many of them are used for another purpose before being disposed of. By encouraging shoppers to use reusable bags when shopping, we can reduce the need for ‘first use’ plastic bags. If you do use ‘first use’ bags, and you don’t reuse them, please place them in a store bin where they can be collected and recycled.

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Composting? Continued from Page one

Today, it is perhaps preserving the outdoors that drives the new popularity of composting – at least in schools. Eco clubs have replaced recycling clubs; however green activities and the study of sustainability has planted the recycle bins firmly in most of the schools. Sam Morris of the SPO and Mark King of the Maine DEP have joined in a campaign to reach out to communities around the state to teach about composting in municipalities. A good part of that campaign could come from schools. This can and hopefully will be followed by more consultations and training.

Our colleges and universities have set a great example for almost any institution of learning interested in composting. In August of 2010, the Maine Compost School offers a special 2 day program just for teachers. Please check our web site for scheduled classes, presentations, and opportunities or go to www.composting.org.



Thermometers are used to monitor compost pile temperatures. Goal is to keep the temperature between 110 to 145 degrees F for optimal composting.



Recycling Education – Updated!!

The month of June saw a ‘revisiting’ at the Chewonki Foundation in Wiscasset. Chewonki had agreed to partner with us at SPO in a new effort to take the ‘Path Ways to a Sustainable Future’ solid waste and recycling educational program into a new and promising future - - beyond the print project that was developed almost twenty years ago. At the joint meeting to develop a new poster and web site resource, the gleesome threesome from Augusta (Bruce White, Suzanne Duplissis and Ben Gadberry) had been invited to stay for lunch and then a tour of the Chewonki Campus. With each visit, there are changes to see and it is more obvious than ever that the organization serves as a model for what they teach and promote. The tour revealed the many faceted programs and projects that reside there.

First however was lunch with the counselors who were setting up for the busy summer ahead. Byron said: “When you have dined in good company, you have dined like the Lord Mayor of London”. The meal was in a round and with those that truly helped us to understand that it is the people that make things come to life in such a marvelous setting. Following the meal though, we were treated to a bit of camp routine, as the session closed with announcements. While Betta Southart could commented that it wasn’t arranged, the wish list of ‘to dos’ bounced into directions for recycling. A contest was held with someone holding up an article of packaging and asking if it could be recycled or should be thrown away. If that were not enough, a waxed container brought an energetic lesson from a person at the table next to us that was met with a resounding cheer – from us included. You have to experience how some can serve as a model for what they teach and what they promote.

First Use Bags *Continued from Page 2*

The City of Brewer’s web site lists a few suggestions about how to reuse your plastic bags. These suggestions share the characteristic of offering what should be only one more use.

10 Ways to Reuse Plastic Shopping Bags

1. Tiny Trash Can Liner
2. Cleaning up After Your Dog During the Daily Walk
3. Store Old Newspapers to Transport to Recycle Area
4. Vehicle Trash Bag
5. Ice Pack
6. Toiletry Tote
7. Kitty Litter Liner
8. Lunch Bags
9. Care Package Padding
10. Store Returnable Cans and Bottles

While recycling, where a product is remade into a new product, could become synonymous with reuse, where a product is used again ‘as is’, the two actions are very different in application.

Perhaps the cashiers at the various stores we shop at could assist in promoting the value of reusable shopping bags.... You now often see stickers on store entrances asking you if ‘you remembered to bring your reusable bags’. Just as the old saying ‘It takes a village to raise a child’, it will take many to help us convert to using reusable shopping bags.

An Intern's Perspective



Benjamin Gadberry is our University of Maine at Farmington student serving as the SPO intern for this summer.

Our state of Maine does a surprisingly good job handling waste. While it has been drilled into my head since childhood that recycling is a good thing, I would never have assumed that more waste in Maine goes into recycling than land filling! Waste to Energy and Recycling combined account for more than 60% of our waste disposal. The Maine's State Planning Office continues to set its sights on reaching the state goal of recycling 50% of its municipal solid waste.

Though this journey has been somewhat of a struggle (as recycling seems to have plateaued in Maine) with the economic downturn Maine has seen a slight increase in recycling rates --- an increase that presents an opportunity for the folks at the Planning Office to exploit. With new marketing avenues such as social networking sites (Facebook etc) the Maine Recycles Campaign can reach a newer (and younger) band of potential recyclers.

Still, social networking includes "social" in its name. Hint: We need your help! Enlist your friends on Facebook to "like" Maine Recycles and continue to spread the word so we can boost Maine's recycling percentage to 40, 45, and then 50%!

Brace Ourselves for Refrigerator 'Swap'?

Last April, an article appeared in the Portland Papers by Tux Turkel about an Efficiency Maine program ready to go this fall. As described in the article, a rebate was planned to get people to trade in the second refrigerator in some households for an Energy Star or energy efficient model. The statistics cited about 100,000 such refrigerators exist in their second life in the State of Maine. The article stresses that any portion of these swapped could mean a significant savings in energy to the state and in money to the consumer. It is another case of where 'something for nothing' that may be reused may go on to haunt us all.

From the standpoint of the reuse, it leaves us wondering about several things that may have caught someone's eye rather than their common sense. From the stand point of a renter, it is hard to tell how old an appliance might be and harder to tell if a landlord might have the good will of the tenant in mind. One story told of the tenant complaining about the lettuce left in the refrigerator would within a few days be found frozen. When the refrigerator was replaced the electric bill dropped by 2/3 and below \$20. There was never a complaint after that.

From still another standpoint, one has to wonder what this approach to improved energy improvement may do to the recycling numbers. Will this mean that the local transfer station should prepare for an influx of refrigerators that must be managed -- much like the 'Cash For Clunkers' program did with vehicles? Will this add additional burden to local transfer stations?

Actions at various colleges and universities give us examples on energy savings related to appliance use. When schools outlawed the dorm refrigerators, the electric bill on metered dorms plummeted. Would similar savings be realized if small businesses and public offices also removed refrigerators? Folks have handled the shift in televisions beautifully! Computers and related equipment are being managed appropriately now.

Thanks to the transfer stations for their role in helping residents better manage their wastes. You plan an important role in our state's solid waste management system.