



Protecting Our Health and Environment

ReNews

YOUR NEWS AND INFORMATION SOURCE ABOUT • RECYCLING • POLLUTION PREVENTION • LESS TOXIC PRODUCTS

Spring 2006

Earth Day Issue



Is plastic recycling a viable and sustainable option?

Plastic recycling poses many challenges, here are just a few:

- There are many different types of plastics. Different polymers have very different properties and use different chemicals in their manufacture, so they cannot be blended.
- The numbered recycling symbol says nothing about whether a plastic item is recyclable; it only specifies the type of plastic polymer that was used (e.g. #6 denotes polystyrene, #3 is polyvinyl chloride).
- Chemical additives used in the manufacture of plastic to give it desired qualities such as hardness or softness impact its ability to recycle easily.
- Additives such as phthalates and bisphenol-A are a concern because of their effect on human health (www.ourstolenfuture.org).
- Health laws prevent using recycled plastics in contact with food.

Since World War II, we've made a complete about-face from a "fix it and make do" to a "use it once and toss it" society, with plastics playing a starring role. In our "throw away" society, it's getting harder and harder to find things that aren't made of plastic. You can even get potato chips in a plastic can to go with your plastic bottle of water. We've been made to think that plastics are indispensable, even good for us. The environment, economy and science are telling a different story.

The Stormwater Issue

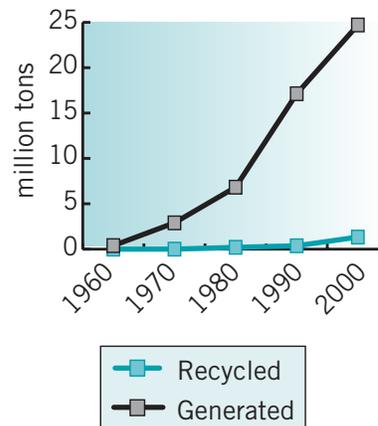
Many people don't know that litter and pollution from streets and freeways can wind up in the storm drains. Storm drains are meant to carry clean rainwater off the roads. In San Mateo County any litter and debris that ends up in stormdrains will flow directly into our creeks, bay and ocean. Much of the trash we produce is single-use plastic packaging, which becomes a larger problem for the environment, our health and our state's economy. For example CalTrans, the agency that manages our highways, spends a total of \$41 million on litter removal annually. This does not include the cost of cleanup on city streets, parks or in recreational waters.

Plastics are not Biodegradable

Plastic is made from petroleum, a non-renewable resource. All the plastic ever produced is still on earth with us today; it never biodegrades. Why should you be concerned? First, if the quantity of plastic produced keeps accelerating at the pace it has since 1960, it will be difficult to manage all of the waste it produces. The graph shows

The Plastic Plague

Plastics generation and recovery
1960 - 2000 (USEPA)



the widening gap between the amount of plastic produced each year and the small fraction that gets recycled. About 25 million tons of plastic were generated in the U.S. in the year 2000, while only 1.3 million tons (5.5 percent) were recycled.

Sea creatures mistake plastic floating on the ocean for plankton, the base of the food chain. These creatures can starve to death because

their stomachs are filled with plastic, or the chemicals contained in them bioaccumulate in the animals' flesh and make their way up the food chain to humans.

What happens to the plastic I put in my recycling bin?

Curbside recycling programs often sort by "neck" shape and not by the recycling symbol and number. Check with your waste management company to find out exactly what is recycled. Plastic shopping bags are probably the most frequently used plastic item, with estimates of 90 billion, or 300 per person used annually in the U.S., costing retailers \$4 billion, ultimately passed onto you, the consumer (source: www.reusablebags.com/facts.php). Some large supermarkets offer bins for recycling, but they are often overflowing. The hope of

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Not Just Garbage — Batteries, Fluorescents and Electronics

Some hazardous household items that could be disposed of in the trash are no longer allowed. The San Mateo County Household Hazardous Waste Program and RecycleWorks are working to make it easier for you to dispose of these items. The regulations on the following items have changed:

Batteries: Household batteries are no longer considered solid waste. They are filled with heavy metals that can pollute ground water and they are recyclable. Keep batteries out of the trash. Recycle or bring to a household hazardous waste collection event. This includes all batteries, AAA, AA, C, D, button cell, 9 Volt, and all others, both rechargeable and single use. Find drop off locations in the table below designated by the “B”. For a list of locations to recycle rechargeable batteries go to www.RBRC.org. Rechargeable batteries include all ni-cad, lithium ion, nickel metal

hydride, cell phone, and small appliance batteries.

Fluorescent Lamps: Mercury vapor is required for the function of fluorescent lamps and is contained inside each bulb at toxic levels. Broken lamps can release mercury to the air and water, effecting the environment and your health. When fluorescent lamps of any type burn out, they should be brought, intact, to a household hazardous waste event, or to a recycling location. This includes fluorescent tubes, compact fluorescent lamps, metal halide lamps and sodium vapor lamps. Look below for drop off locations, designated by the “L”.

Consumer Electronic appliances: Electronic waste, consisting of discarded computers, televisions, cell phones, fax machines, stereos and other electronic equipment, is a massive problem in California. Monitors and televisions cannot be put into landfills because of their lead

content. Other electronic equipment also contains heavy metals including mercury, arsenic, and cadmium, among others. Computers under five years old and other working electronics can generally be reused, while older computers and broken electronics are generally recycled. Please donate or recycle your old electronics. Electronics are not accepted at Household Hazardous Waste Events.

Electronic Drop Off Locations

- **Goodwill:** Drop off computers, laptops, televisions, networking equipment, cell phones, and some other electronics, working or not, at any Goodwill Donation Center free of charge. Goodwill will sort the electronics for reuse and recycling. Visit www.sfgoodwill.org for Donation Center locations.
- **Other Thrift Shops and Charitable Organizations:** Generally, these organizations will accept computers that are less than five years old and in good condition. Many will also take other electronics in good working condition. For donation options, download the RecycleWorks Re-Use Guide http://www.recycleworks.org/pdf/reuse_guide.pdf and look under the “computer equipment” column. Be sure to call before taking items in because electronics acceptance policies often change.
- **Transfer Stations:** Six transfer stations in San Mateo County accept electronics for recycling. None of the electronics brought to transfer stations are refurbished for reuse -all are de-manufactured and recycled. See drop off locations designated by the “E”.
- **Other Electronics Recycling Options:** For a comprehensive list of electronics recycling and reuse options, use the Recycling Center Search Database at www.recycleworks.org/ewaste/ and search under the “electronics” category or call Recycle Works at (888) 442-2666.

If you have any questions about proper disposal of other household chemicals please call (650) 363-4305. To dispose of other household toxics at a collection event call (650) 363-4718 or visit www.smhealth.org/bhw to make an appointment.

Drop-off Site	Address	Phone	City	Items		
Atherton Town Hall	91 Ashfield Rd.	325-4457	Atherton	B		
Atherton Permit Center	83 Station Ln.	752-0526	Atherton	B		
Burlingame City Hall	501 Primrose Rd.	558-7200	Burlingame	B		
Allied Waste	1680 Edgeworth Ave.	756-1130	Daly City	B		E
Bayshore Library Third Floor	460 Martin St.	991-8074	Daly City	B		
City Hall Main Lobby	333 90th St.	991-8078	Daly City	B		
Serramonte Library	40 Wembley Dr.	991-8023	Daly City	B		
Westlake Library	275 Southgate Ave.	991-8071	Daly City	B		
City Hall	610 Foster City Blvd.	286-3200	Foster City	B		
Ocean Shore Hardware	111 Main St.	726-5505	Half Moon Bay		L	
Ox Mountain Landfill	12310 Highway 92	726-1819	Half Moon Bay			E
Belle Haven Child Development Center	410 Ivy Dr.	330-2270	Menlo Park	B		
Menlo Park Library	801 Alma St.	330-2500	Menlo Park	B		
Onetta Harris Community Center	100 Terminal Ave.	330-2250	Menlo Park	B		
Millbrae Library	1 Library Ave.	697-7607	Millbrae	B		
Coastside Scavenger	1046 Palmetto Ave.	355-9000	Pacifica	B	L	E
San Mateo County Government Center	455 County Center, 1st floor	363-4957	Redwood City	B		
San Bruno Garbage Co.	101 Tanforan Ave.	583-8536	San Bruno	B	L	E
Allied Waste	333 Shoreway Rd.	637-1411	San Carlos	B	L	E
San Mateo City Hall	330 W. 20th Ave.	522-7346	San Mateo	B		
Blueline Transfer	500 E. Jamie Ct.	589-5511	So.San Francisco	B	L	E
Skylonda Fire Station	17290 Skyline Blvd.	851-1860	Woodside	B		
				B-household batteries	L-fluorescent lamps	E-electronics



ALTERNATIVES CORNER

Contending with Weeds

If there were a Plant Olympics, weeds would be the gold medal winners. They are adaptable and do well in a variety of conditions. To root out weeds, use the following guidelines and controls.

- Build good soil to make weeding easier.
- Manage irrigation to keep weeds down.
- Use dense ground covers or thick foliage to shade out weeds.
- Learn the growth habits and life cycles of your weeds.
- Weed when the soil is moderately moist.

Pulling weeds usually involves using a tool to loosen the soil and then pulling the plant by hand. Depending on the size of the plant you're working with, a hand fork, spading fork, or mattock can make weeding easier; for big shrubs, a Weed Wrench is very effective and satisfying to use. Wearing gloves is always a good idea.

Scraping can help you take out shallow-rooted plants or kill weeds when they're young. The most common tool for this is a hoe. While scraping is an effective control for both annuals and perennials, avoid cultivating the soil any more than necessary to remove the weeds. You don't want to turn over the soil and bring up new weed seeds, or disrupt the food web in the soil, or damage soil structure.

Cutting down weeds may be necessary if there are extensive weed problems or you're dealing with large plants. Cutting may also be needed to remove bushy overgrowth, such as blackberry vines, before you can remove the roots. Where "soft" weeds such as grass predominate, use an electric mower or weed whacker to keep growth in check and prevent plants from flowering. For vines and shrubs, cut them away with pruners, loppers, or a pruning saw, then dig them out or cover them with mulch.

Mulching works in two ways - by blocking sunlight and creating a barrier to growth. It prevents many annuals from germinating. Since perennials have sturdy underground structures, mulch alone is less effective at suppressing them. Used in combination with a barrier such as newspaper, cardboard, or decomposable fabrics (nondecomposable fabrics become both a blight and disposal problem), mulch will keep most perennials down. The best approach is

to pull or cut down perennials first, then lay down a barrier and mulch.

Applying least-toxic herbicides. There are a few less-harmful products on the market that can be used in combination with other weed control efforts. Corn gluten meal — a waste product of corn syrup processing — is a fine, yellow powder applied to soil. It suppresses germination of many common annual grasses and broadleaf weeds, but its effect is short-lived, so applications must be carefully timed to coincide with seed germination. Herbicidal "soaps" and acetic acid (vinegar) kill plant tissue that they contact by disrupting plant cell membranes. They are more effective against annuals than perennials — tough weeds resist these herbicides or resprout from roots. In many cases it is just as effective to pull, cut, and mulch as to use least-toxic herbicides because they have to be used again and again.

To find local stores that carry less toxic herbicides go to www.ourwaterourworld.org and click on "Where to Buy Products."

To request a copy of the 72-page book, "Bay Friendly Gardening" and/or a fact sheet with more information on weeds, call (650) 599-1325, email spratt@co.sanmateo.ca.us, or download both documents at www.flowstobay.org.

Adapted from "Bay-Friendly Gardening"



Weed and Feed, Your Health and the Environment

Weed and feed is often broadcast over large areas such as a lawn. As a result unneeded pesticides are applied to nonweed vegetation and soil. The quick release fertilizer can cause a flush of growth, which attracts pests, leads to more pruning or mowing and can result in soil depletion. If there is a storm or if over watered, runoff contaminates waterways, causing oxygen depletion and poisoning fish.

In relation to human and animal health, the pesticide in Weed and Feed, 2,4-D, is associated with neurological disorders, reproductive problems, kidney and liver damage, non-Hodgkin's lymphoma and other cancers, and disruption of the endocrine (hormonal) system.

Do You Change Your Own Motor Oil and Filter? Take the Last Step!

If you're one of millions of do-it-yourselfers (DIYers) who change their own oil, you can help save energy and a valuable resource by recycling the used motor oil and filter from your car, truck, boat, or recreational vehicle.

Before you change your oil, refer to your vehicle owner's manual for specific instructions on changing motor oil. Typically, oil changes are completed in a series of steps:

Step 1: Locate the drain plug underneath the vehicle, remove it as directed by your owner's manual, and drain the oil from the engine into a pan that is large enough to hold the entire contents of the crankcase (most passenger cars hold about 5 quarts of oil).

Step 2: Once the oil has been completely drained, change the oil filter. Note that it may be necessary to use a filter wrench to remove the old filter. Install the new filter as directed by the owner's manual.

The filter will contain residual oil, so take steps to prevent spilling this oil as the filter is removed. Place the open end of the filter face down over the drain pan or the used oil-recycling container to allow the oil to drain from the filter. If possible, allow the filter to sit in this position for at least 12 hours.

Step 3: Once the used oil has drained from the engine, replace the drain plug as directed by the owner's manual. Wipe up any drips with rags or paper towels.

Step 4: Remove the oil cap and add the amount of oil required by the instructions in the owner's manual. Do not overfill. Use a funnel to prevent drips and make sure to completely drain each container of oil.

Step 5: Carefully remove the oil drain pan from under the vehicle. Using a funnel, pour the used oil into a clean container with a lid that screws on tightly (for example, an empty milk or water jug or the empty oil bottles from the oil just added to the engine). You can also use oil drain pans that double as used oil containers.

When selecting a container to hold used oil, avoid plastic bottles or containers once used for bleach, cleaners, or other automobile fluids such as antifreeze. These containers may contain residues that would contaminate the used oil, so it is not easy to recycle. Also avoid paint cans and other metal containers or containers used for gasoline.

Additionally, do not mix other lubricants such as brake fluid or transmission fluid or other liquids with the used oil. Recycling centers cannot accept the used oil if it is contaminated with other liquids.

Take the last Step! Take your oil and filter to your nearest recycling center, or recycle it curbside where your garbage company offers that service. Visit www.earth911.org or call 1-800-CLEANUP for the location of a facility near you, or call your garbage hauler to find out if they collect oil curbside.

Safe Cosmetics Bill Signed by the Governor



You may have seen the article in the September 2005 ReNews titled:

Uncovering the Beast

Behind Beauty Products: Are They Safe? (available online at www.flowstobay.org/resources/ReNews.html) At that time legislation requiring companies to disclose potentially hazardous ingredients to the state was pending. Governor Schwarzenegger signed Senate Bill SB484 in October.

SB 484 will:

- Require cosmetics manufacturers to disclose to the state any product ingredient that is on state or federal lists of chemicals that cause cancer or birth defects.
- Allow the California Department of Health Services (DHS) to demand manufacturers supply any health related information about cosmetic ingredients.
- Authorize CalOSHA to regulate the products to protect salon workers if they determine a safety risk.

For more information go to www.safecosmetics.org/.

The Plastic Plague

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most consumers would be that a plastic bottle or bag would end up again as another bag or bottle; however, almost all grocery bags are made from virgin plastic. "Recycled" grocery bags are typically made into a product, like plastic lumber, which can never be recycled.

What can you do to reduce plastic?

It would be virtually impossible to eliminate plastics from our lives, but each one of us can take responsibility for our personal consumption of plastic. One of the best ways to start reducing your use of plastic is to avoid single-use plastic packaging, for takeout meals, fast food or deli packages, convenience and snack food, or drink containers, consumer items and of course the ever present plastic grocery bag. The next time you make a purchase, take note of the packaging and see if you can make a choice of no plastic or less plastic packaging and if the grocery clerk asks you "paper or plastic?" choose paper. Or better yet, bring your own bag!

From Earth Resource Foundation Campaign Against the Plastic Plague (CAPP) www.earthresource.org

Adapted from an article by Sarah S. Mosko, Ph.D.