

## ASAP RECYCLE DISCUSSION

I'm no different than anyone else as I struggle to figure out how to recycle and be as waste free as I can. What I am doing is trying to learn all that I can on the subject and find as many ways to return scrap, leftover items back into some sort of positive reuse. So, if you have suggestions or ideas, please don't hesitate to speak up and send us those comments. In fact, I want this to be a fun learning experience for all of us, so please get involved. A quick disclaimer though...I believe all of the information I'm going to share with you is accurate and up to date, but things change rapidly these days so there just may be a gap here or there. I did my best. The other thing I want to mention is that, as I present the material I put together for you, you will find that the subject will kind of wander between recycling, waste management and environmental issues. I'm sorry, but I can't help it because all of these issues are intertwined with each other. So, we've got a lot of ground to cover so let's jump into it!

Recycle; that's a well-used term. But, just what does that word, recycle, mean to you? The Merriam Webster Dictionary describes the word recycle this way:

1. To pass again through a cycle of changes or treatment
2. To process (as liquid body waste, glass, or cans) in order to regain materials for human use

OK, I guess I'm only partially good with that definition, although I'm sure that is the proper description of the word recycle. To me, however, recycle means a whole lot more than that. In fact, I feel that recycling is more a mindset and lifestyle that attempts to eliminate the waste of, and final complete disposal of, just about anything. I suppose the bottom line is waste prevention. The challenge is just how to go about such a difficult and all encompassing undertaking.

I would say the starting point is "awareness". A person would need to step back, take a deep breath, and then conscientiously and deliberately reflect, and then actually examine their lifestyle and actions during everyday life. This would probably lead to some form of list making or note taking to categorize what is done/performed during a "normal" day and what is used in the process of that activity. The next logical step would be to try to determine what material or debris is left over after the various activities have been performed. This, of course, leads to the final portion of the self-examination process of asking ourselves "Just what have I been doing with all of this left over material?" Hmmm, the out come or answer to your question just may be "eye opening"!

So, we've pretty much come to the conclusion that recycling and waste prevention goes hand in hand. One of the issues that I feel subconsciously "pushes" us towards waste is the fact that the business community branded us a long time ago as "consumers". Yeah, to the business world, we are basically looked upon as two legged consuming machines that need to be buying and buying and buying. In order to get those two legged consuming machines coming back and buying more and more, things need to get used up, wear out, break down or just go out of style or favor. All of the "consumable" products need to be attractively packaged to make them even more desirable. These two legged

consuming machines need to be (and have been) programmed to believe that more is better, and, when you don't want some thing anymore for what ever reason, you simply toss it into the trash can along side the house with no further thought about it. Yikes! We are the programmed two legged consuming machines. I'm sure you can see where I'm going with this.

What can we do to change this sad situation and elevate ourselves to a better, more sustainable way of life? Well, first, we can start with the self-evaluation process that I mentioned before. We need to confront and acknowledge our personal involvement in this environmentally destructive and wasteful activity and then start putting together a plan to change our "ways" of wanting/needing/consuming. If we allow our selves to really embrace the recycling activity, we may find that we will undertake the whole process to a point that we start getting creative as how to use every thing we come in contact with (products/materials), or make sure that what we can no longer use is absolutely going to be recycled into a reusable material in some sort of manner or program. But, just as important, we will begin to really closely examine and control (change) our "need/want" for "things" that we really don't need, but only think we do because we "want" it at the moment. Embracing this activity will become a complete realignment of our thought process that will ultimately clean up our lives, simplify our daily life, probably save us a ton of money, AND, help Mother Earth in the process. It will become a personal challenge not to waste a thing. Are you up to such a lofty challenge?

Before I dive into the "how to's" of recycling, let's throw a few facts out on the table of where we are today that may help you understand the necessity of implementing recycling into your personal life. First, have you ever given any thought of what happens to the trash in the cans that you place at the end of the driveway once a week? You know, the two cans that are overflowing that gets picked up and tossed into the back of that noisy, smelly garbage truck. Well, for the Sonora area any way, it first is transported to and dumped in the Waste Management-Cal Sierra facility at the end of Industrial Drive in East Sonora. There a halfhearted attempt is made to recycle some material from the garbage, but in reality, most every thing is actually run over by a large tractor/loader and crushed. Then the garbage is loaded in to large diesel burning trucks, which take the garbage down to a landfill (Forward Landfill) in San Joaquin County. Now, that's not very expensive is it? OR, is it! How good is that for our environment? All those big trucks burning all of that diesel to haul that garbage all of those miles. All of the wear and tear on our roads and the trucks themselves. And then, the final insult to Mother Earth, the load is just dumped in a landfill and covered. Couldn't there be a better way?

Let's add insult to injury. Consider the fact that Californians generate 44 million tons of garbage each year. Think about that – it's incredible! That's 8 pounds of garbage per person per day! In Tuolumne County, that means 80,300 tons of garbage is created each year. We recycle or divert 50% of that and end up with 40,150 tons that needs to be disposed in a landfill. We can, and must do better than that. As you can see, it's not going be resolved just by recycling, but by waste prevention too. Because, think about it for a moment. Even if we were some how able to recycle every thing we were no longer able

to use, consider all of the effort, time and energy needed to sort, crush, load, ship and finally process all of the various materials back into a “raw” material that can be made into a new product. During the economic “boom” of the last several years that was occurring in China, India and several other emerging Countries, they were buying the recycled materials from us because of the need for raw materials for product manufacture. The recycled materials were transported by container ships to those countries for reprocessing into raw material and then used to make new products. Those products were then shipped right back to us for consumption. Just how cost effective and efficient is that little operation. And, now that the “boom” has come to a screeching halt, they don’t want our recycled material because their factories are going idle. So there is no money in recycling right now, and, I guess you have a pretty good idea where the materials will start being redirected to. Yep, the good ‘ol landfill. We as human beings need to rethink our actions and living practices, as what we are doing right now is far from sustainable and horribly wasteful.

Ok, so now that we are enlightened and dismayed with what is going on in our world, we are going to make a commitment to do better – way better, right? So let’s tackle this recycle thing for a start. Well, we can (or maybe already are) saving and recycling all of our used plastic, glass and aluminum containers. We are either using our own cloth bags to carry our groceries home, or, we are very careful to round up and return the plastic bags back to the collection bins at the stores. Or, are we saving and then reusing the paper shopping bags some how, or, are we disposing of them in the trash? What about the cardboard that you end up with after buying a product; where does that end up. Then we have the plastic bags that you put the tomatoes in or the packaged meat not to mention the rubber bands around the asparagus stalks that you buy. You are saving and reusing them, right? Old newspapers and magazines, I know that you are segregating them and making sure they get dropped off at the recycling center, right? Heck, this is the easy stuff.

Batteries for flashlights, toys and other things like cameras – you have weaned yourself away from disposable batteries to rechargeable batteries, right? No? Why, because they’re too expensive or too much hassle? Tch, tch. Don’t you know those disposable batteries are toxic and almost all of them end up in the landfill when they have gone dead? What about the batteries for all of those cordless tools that you bought? When the battery dies and you get sticker shock at how much a replacement battery costs, do you toss the tool and battery into the trash can and go buy another new tool kit because the whole new kit is only a little bit more money than the replacement battery? That’s exactly what the manufacturers want you to do! Did you know that you can actually get the battery rebuilt for those tools, and in most cases, it will be as good as or better than the original one?

Now let’s step it up a little more. You do compost your qualified (more on this later) table and cooking scraps along with the garden trimmings and such, right? If not, why not? Properly composted material is one of the best ways to “feed” you garden plants and trees. If you are tossing this garden “gold” into the trashcan you are throwing money right out the window in more ways than one! If you are sending it down the drain by way of

the garbage disposal, that's even worse as either you are prematurely filling your septic tank with sludge or you are making the sewer system deal with it. If you start a worm bin to produce "food material" for your plants, that is where some of your cardboard can go along with vegetable scraps from the kitchen, and the result will be the best "food" there is for your plants.

Are you like me in that you want to at least partially maintain your own vehicle? If so, I know you are making sure that you get as much of the oil out of the plastic containers as you can before putting them in with the other plastic to be recycled. And, I know you are carefully draining the oil out of the drain pan into the recycle oil container that you got from the Tuolumne County Solid Waste Division when they ran one of their promotions to keep oil out of the storm drains or ground water. Oil doesn't dissolve in water. It lasts a long time and sticks to everything from beach sand to bird feathers. Oil and petroleum products are toxic to people, wildlife and plants. One quart of motor oil can pollute 250,000 gallons of water, and one gallon of gasoline can pollute 750,000 gallons of water! Oil that leaks from our cars onto road and driveways is washed into the storm drains, and then usually flows directly into a lake or stream. Used motor oil is the largest single source of oil pollution in lakes, streams and rivers. Americans spill 180 million gallons of used oil each year into the nation's waters. This is 16 times the amount spilled by the Exxon Valdez in Alaska! Yeah, and what about that pesky, slimy, contaminated oil filter? You do take the time to drain every bit of oil out of it into the recycle container before you take it to Waste Management to recycle it too, right? Yeah, I thought so.

As you can see, this recycle "thing" is no "walk in the park". You have to really embrace the activity and actually feel good about what you are doing in order to accomplish the difference that you are striving to make. It would be awesome if we all could institute all of the recycling actions at one time, but the reality of it is that we will probably need to start with a few and keep adding new programs as we go along. Doing some thing is better than doing nothing, I guess. But, I hope that you can now see that waste prevention will really lighten the load of the recycling job. If there is not a lot left over from your daily living operations, then there will be very little that needs to be recycled. I guess it all relates in one way or another to all of those old clichés that I heard over and over from my Grand Parents that that lived through the great depression in the 1930's: A penny saved is a penny earned; Waste not, want not; Live with-in your means; etc.

We Americans are so blessed, but so spoiled and wasteful. Go look in your clothes closet. How many of the garments and shoes have you NOT worn in a year or more? I'll bet that, if you are honest with yourself, there probably are some clothes that you have only worn once! Time to think about a church or charity to get these unused items to people that really can use them. Look out in the garage or up in the attic. What is "hanging around" cluttering these areas that never gets used and needs to "find a new home"? How about a garage sale, you might even end up with a little extra cash in your pocket and actually meeting your neighbors for the first time! What about joining the local 'freecycling' group? More on this later.

Talking about things “hanging around” the house, let’s talk about some potentially dangerous and very contaminating substances we all own and take for granted, but that absolutely need to be properly handled and recycled or properly disposed of. Would you believe that old medications are very harmful to our environment, especially when flushed down the toilet? The sewage treatment plants, let alone septic systems, can’t process these materials properly and they find their way back out into our environment where they do harm. Old paint, pesticides, glues, cleaning materials, waxes and caulking all need to be properly disposed of at the regularly scheduled hazardous waste disposal days sponsored by the County Solid Waste Department.

Then we get to home repairs or renovations. Do you choose renewable type materials, or just go with the handyman or Contractors suggestion and lowest bid price? Do you do any research at all before under taking repairs or renovations? If you need a new roof, have you ever considered replacing the old composition shingle roof with a metal roof covering? The metal is way lighter, way stronger, lasts way longer and, if it ever does fail and needs to be replaced, it’s recyclable! The composition shingle roof, even if you purchase the best grade material, will probably last only 20 years if you are lucky because of the materials used and the weather changes (ozone/ultra violet rays) that we are experiencing. And, for the most part, at least right now, composition shingles are not being recycled and end up in our landfill situation. As you can see, we are surrounded by wasteful practices and situations, many of which most of us are oblivious to.

So my question to you is this: Can you have a change in mindset? Can you turn your “wantor” button off or at least down? Can you become frugal, which is not the same as being cheap? Part of this new mindset is an awareness and a want to question buying decisions before you plunk your hard earned money down on the counter for just another ‘thing’ you think you just have to have at the moment. One catchy phrase we all must also ponder is the “Life Time Warranty” that is thrown around on so many products today. Those products usually carry a hefty premium in cost. But, what good is the warranty if the company goes out of business or is bought up and reorganized by another company? What good is the “Life Time Warranty” if you forget the product has one, or just as bad, you lose the receipt and paper work? I have been a sucker for that feel good “Life Time Warranty” pitch my whole life and am finding out how little it actually means the older I get and those products I have fail. As I watch one company after another go out of business or get swallowed up by other companies, which void or negate the so-called Life Time Warranty, there I am with my wallet empty, expectations crushed and my head hanging in disbelief. How could have I been so gullible? False hopes, empty promises.... the great product of corporate America that got us into the present financial situation our Country finds it self in today. Maybe I know part of the answer: Buy local. At least then you can go confront the person that sold you the product that failed that was supposed to be sooo great but wasn’t.

Back to waste prevention, which is the linchpin of what we want to accomplish. Waste prevention is also been known as “source reduction”. Source reduction means eliminating waste before it is created. This does take an effort on our part and that new awareness we’ve been bantering about previously. I plagiarized the following from the

Waste Prevention pamphlet put out by the Tuolumne County Solid Waste Board and the local recyclers and refuse haulers.

First, to be a person who prevents waste, you must be a 'smart shopper', which will not only save you money, but also reduce trash.

- Buy only what you need
- Buy reusable rather than single-use products
- Buy durable, repairable products
- Repair old items and use them again
- Purchase products that can be recycled locally or that contain recycled materials

Second, if you want to take "it" to the next level (and I hope you do!), how about:

- Put less packaging in your shopping cart – you'll stretch your food dollars
- Purchase products in refillable or reusable containers
- Choose products with the least amount of packaging
- Buy fresh produce without packaging
- Buy concentrates, larger-sized containers, or buy in bulk
- Avoid individually-wrapped or single-serving products
- Bring your own shopping bag(s) to the store
- Bank on line – get your monthly statement by email
- Pay your monthly bills on line
- Receive newsletters and magazines on line
- Send greeting cards by email/on line rather than paper ones by mail

And finally, embrace the movement and become an advocate! In doing so you could:

- Ask store managers to carry products that create less waste
- Write manufacturers and suggest that they:
  - a. Redesign products or packing to eliminate excess
  - b. Make products that are repairable, more durable and longer lasting
  - c. Use recycled materials in the manufacturing process whenever possible
- Buy safe substitutes for harsh chemical products that are difficult to dispose of
- Ask that your name be removed from mailing lists – include all versions of your name and address
  - a. Direct Marketing Association  
P.O. Box 9008  
Farmington, NY 11735-9008
  - b. Junk mail rider: [www.41pounds.org](http://www.41pounds.org) 866-417-4141 \$41.00
  - c. Junk mail rider: [www.greendimes.com](http://www.greendimes.com)

With that, are there any questions or comments any of you would like to share with us at ASAP?