

VOI.1, ISSUE 2

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Taking Out the Trash

By Mark Thompson



“In Ontario, we currently divert and recycle in excess of 50 per cent of the waste material generated, and this number is growing every year.”

“Everything just goes to landfill anyway.”

“It’s just getting shipped to China to be landfilled.”

“It costs more money and energy to recycle, so why make the effort?”

LET’S FACE IT, PEOPLE HATE CHANGE, which is why despite the now seemingly universal acceptance of the importance of recycling, we still hear excuses like the ones listed above. Sadly, especially in the workplace where extra effort is rarely welcomed, many view recycling as an adversary – it costs money, energy, time and takes up more space. And so, in a weak attempt to avoid disturbing set routines, people buy into a few common myths. Let’s review three of the BIG ones.

Myth 1 - Everything goes to landfill anyway

Incorrect. In Ontario, we currently divert and recycle in excess of 50 per cent of the waste material generated, and this number is growing every year. Where does it all go, you ask?

Aluminum cans are shredded, melted down, and the molten aluminum poured into giant moulds. These blocks are then sold to companies who make new products such as new car and plane parts, or maybe the can containing your next drink.

Glass is crushed and added to the mix of raw materials that make up new glass containers. The materials are melted in a furnace and then molded or blown to make new bottles and jars. Glass is also used as an ingredient in new bricks, road building materials and media for water filtration.

Sorted **plastics** have a wide variety of uses and can be shredded, washed, melted and molded into new products such as new bottles, garden furniture or fleece jackets.

When **Paper / Cardboard** gets to the recycled paper mill it is pulped, cleaned and then screened. In the case of printed paper, such as newspapers and magazines, the ink is then removed using soap and bubbles of air. The “pulp” is then ready to be made into paper, which happens on very large machines. It is drained, pressed, dried and then made into reels or sheets.

Steel is a wonderful product to recycle, as it can be reprocessed again and again. Steel cans are melted down in a furnace and combined with other raw materials like molten iron. The hot steel is then cast into solid slabs that can be rolled into foil to make new cans or other steel products.

Myth 2 - Plastic is being shipped to China to be landfilled

While plastics and other materials are often shipped to China and other countries, they are not just dumped there. Rather, with China’s rapidly-growing manufacturing sectors, ‘secondary resources’ are in high demand, meaning that these materials are being purchased for further use. As a ton of plastic bottles might fetch \$400, it would make no economic sense to ship it half way around the world to simply dump. If we want recycled plastics to be used again, it is inevitable that at least a proportion of our waste plastics will be exported to China.

Myth 3 - Recycle Costs more than landfill and is a waste of energy

This is false.

Recycling one ton of office paper, cardboard or newspaper can save in excess of 17 trees and has a value of over \$100.

The energy saved from recycling one glass bottle in place of making a new one will:

- Power a 100 watt light bulb for almost an hour
- Power a computer for 20 minutes
- Power a washing machine for 10 minutes

Producing steel from recycled material saves 75 per cent of the energy needed for steel made from virgin material. Recycling aluminum takes only 5 per cent of the energy it takes to make new aluminum, and produces only 5 per cent of the CO₂ emissions. Recycling just one plastic bottle saves enough energy to power a 60W light bulb for six hours.

Having debunked the myths, it is easy to see that recycling, especially at the office, is worth the effort. Over the course of the next few issues, I will be sharing success stories and ideas on how can make an impact in your workplace by refreshing or revisiting your current recycling programs.

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