

WASTE BYTES!

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

State Department of Agriculture Schedules September Collection of Old Pesticides

In barns, basements, sheds, or garages throughout the state, reside tons of banned and unusable pesticides: old chemicals with infamous names like DDT, lead arsenate, 2,4,5-T, and chlordane. Often, new owners of older homes or farms discover they have inherited hazardous waste. When they do, citizens face a dilemma: hire an expensive hazardous waste disposal service or dump the chemicals illegally, inviting harm to the environment and public health.

This fall, the Maine Board of Pesticides Control (BPC) will dispose of banned pesticides or pesticides that have become caked, frozen, or otherwise rendered unusable. The collected chemicals go to out-of-state disposal facilities licensed by the US EPA where they are incinerated or reprocessed.

“We urge people holding these chemicals to contact us immediately to register,” says Paul Schlein, BPC Public Information Officer. “There will be four sites throughout the state where folks will be able to bring their obsolete pesticides.”

To register, find out collection dates and locations, and learn important information about the temporary storage and transportation of obsolete pesticides, go to the BPC Web site at www.thinkfirstspraylast.org. Or, call the BPC at 287-2731.



INSIDE THIS ISSUE

State DOA Schedules Sep. Collection of Pesticides	1
Hi There! It's Another Issue of "Waste Bytes!"	1
Recycling in Maine Towns: What Makes it Tick?	2
Compost School	3
Support the Hierarchy and Live Healthy!	4
WM&R Program Has New Summer Energy	4

Hi There! It's Another Issue of "Waste Bytes!"

This is issue two, and we are on our way. In our move, we may have lost a few; however we now can say that the sky is the limit for those we can reach. First we have to ask for the help of our faithful followers. If you think someone should get our message, just forward a copy of your issue and ask them to contact the State Planning Office at www.MaineRecycles.com

We have also added more than 200 of Maine's public libraries to our list. If someone you know doesn't have a computer or access to the Internet, they can most likely read "Waste Bytes" when they next visit their local library.

Let us know how we are doing too. We are here to serve you, and (dare I say?) take a byte out of waste.

Recycling in Maine Towns: What Makes it Tick?

When researchers seek to understand any type of human behavior, an issue that is almost inevitably explored is the relative influence of nature vs. nurture in determining such behaviors. In other words, is the behavior more influenced by fixed, inborn factors like genetics and instincts, or by malleable, environmental factors like life experiences and social setting?

While not perfectly analogous (since towns don't have genetic codes), a similar question could be raised about recycling behavior amongst individual towns. For example, is recycling success in towns more influenced by relatively fixed demographic characteristics like income level, population size, and educational attainment, or is it more influenced by modifiable town policies on recycling and waste? In other words, do certain communities recycle better than others because of the type of town or people that live there, or do they recycle better because of specific policies that promote recycling?

In order to find an answer to this question, our intern Nick Miller embarked on a summer-long project, utilizing the waste and recycling data towns report to the State Planning Office, census data, and one on one interviews with transfer station managers in individual communities. Nick carefully selected a group of 61 communities and explored demographic factors such as income, education, population, age, and party affiliation, and also municipal policies such as town ordinances, the number of materials accepted, mandatory recycling, curbside pick-up, and pay-as-you-throw. A half dozen of these communities were chosen for in-depth interviews and case studies. The result of these efforts was a roughly 40-page report, and although definitive conclusions could not be reached on the effects of every single town policy and demographic characteristic, several key findings did emerge.

First, in terms of demographics, the study found a clear positive correlation between income levels, education levels, and recycling rates. In other words,



the wealthier or more educated a town was, the more likely it was to have a high recycling rate. Population also seemed to have a positive correlation with recycling rates, but this relationship was weaker and only up to a certain population level.

As for municipal policies, the number of materials accepted was by far the best predictor of recycling success of any factor investigated in the study. Simply put, the more materials a town accepts, the more likely it is to have a high recycling rate, and this holds whether a town is wealthy or poor, well-educated or less educated. Accepting bulky recyclable materials and creating venues for reuse were found to be particularly important in achieving high recycling rates. Town ordinances on recycling and recycling committees also had moderate positive correlations with recycling rates, while strong conclusions could not be drawn on pay-as-you-throw, mandatory recycling, or curbside recycling.

The interviews with town officials reinforced these findings, while also highlighting the fact that there are many different ways to create a successful recycling program. If there was a common denominator, however, it seemed to be accepting a variety of materials while providing accessible information and efficient services to residents seeking to recycle. Look for the full report to be up on our website sometime in the near future.

Compost School

When I was growing up in South Portland, if someone were to get up early enough, they might actually see high school students off for the summer and a few older individuals, mostly men, being picked up and transported to a day in the fields of the truck farms of Scarborough or Cape Elizabeth. I was reminded of this recently when I found myself in front of an Augusta motel waiting for the van to shuttle a group of about 10 to Highmoor Farm in Monmouth. I once lived for a short time just down the road at the Spring Brook Country Club. Back then I worked in a local restaurant and lived with the greens keeper and his wife across from the golf course. Never did I dream that I would one day be returning to the Route 202 neighborhood to be groomed in another waste reduction technique - composting.

In the Waste Management Hierarchy, there are six levels arranged from highest priority to lowest: Reduce; Reuse; Recycle; and then Compost; Waste-to-Energy; and Landfill. To school children, composting may suggest worm composting – vermicular. Schools have often built three bay compost area or in more recent years put into use any one of the available designs of plastic home compost bins. Individual bins are becoming more and more common in the backyard as the public becomes “greener.” Coming from this movement and from foreign countries where space is at a premium, one may even find Bokashi composting in a few apartments. The experience in Monmouth is at another level altogether though.

Composting addressed in this session of the Maine Compost School was appropriate to at least the working farm but more often to a commercial or municipal waste water treatment or solid waste facility. The teaching faculty consisted of: Dr. Bill Seekins, Maine Department of Agriculture; Mark King, Maine DEP; George MacDonald, Maine SPO; and Mark Hutchinson, University of Maine Extension Service. While instruction was set at the Highmoor Farm Experimental Station, almost every day included a journey of the school’s two vans into the countryside to visit working facilities dedicated to varying purposes or materials with composting in common. This summer’s school recruited students from the northeast (including Canada) and Midwest states along with a



delegation from Puerto Rico. The reasons for attending the one week school were as diverse as the individual students themselves; however the instruction focused on interaction, team building activities, and problem solving.

In my reading material, selections have changed now. I will still begin the day with the newspaper; at any time pick up a book on Maine History; look forward to when I might spy a mystery; occasionally take to a biography; almost daily sit down with a cookbook; and where it used to be that my professional literature was made up of book reviews and maybe the Library Journal, I now wait for the next chapter in “Biocycle” and every now-and-then a whole new field of manure.



Support the Hierarchy and Live Healthy!

This is the time to take a bite out of waste. We know how short the summer is. At the same time, we know how short the growing season is here in Maine. The result is that we have to take advantage of the weather and the locally grown produce when we have both in abundance. As we visit our farm stands and farmers' markets, we also support the most fundamental or basic levels of the Waste Management Hierarchy.

When the first signs appear for beet greens and few other items, the stop will save packaging in great amounts. At most places, we are even welcome to return our plastic bags that crept into our practices on the days when we dropped by the store without our reusable bags. During the sweet corn season our local farmers are almost begging for anything that will let a customer leave happy – all the more to enjoy the fresh treat of melted butter on something or other.

The setting is a bit strange as well. It is rare that we don't find Styrofoam trays or plastic wrap in the produce section of the local store. During eight months of the year, one has to believe that the local food chain has a conspiracy to drive their customers crazy trying to open an end of the plastic bags on a roll or else dispense by some other devious method.

In the long or the short of it, everything seems healthy for this half of the year. It is a time when the earth gives up special treasures. Vegetables can now be good year around; however there is something special when we feel like making a meal out of fresh beans with butter. We never seem to tire of a summer BLT with the local tomatoes. A fresh ear of corn invites the seafood cookout, and the Fourth of July's salmon and peas tradition has as much emphasis on the fresh peas as on the Atlantic salmon. Need we mention too that we are forced to give up strawberry shortcake month for blueberry pies?

Oh yes! "Waste Bytes" wanted to draw our attention to packaging, buying bulk, and supporting Maine agriculture! Remember to compost your pre-consumer trimmings as well. Everyone wins this time of year!



Waste Management and Recycling Program Has New Summer Energy

The summer internship program brought a new face and new ideas to the Waste Management and Recycling Program for the summer months this year. Nick Miller resides in Edgecomb with his family during the summer and will return to his senior year at Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut this September.

With an interest in Public Administration and Political Science, Nick found himself in the center of the SPO recycling team. The team is always working with the data collected from the municipalities and this allowed some time to focus on a few lingering questions about the Industry. Taking advantage of Nick's writing skills and attention to detail, George MacDonald and Sam Morris managed to steer Nick into some local research and interpretation of changes taking place with an objective view.

Nick should be credited for the new look of this newsletter, as well as the successful transition to the electronic format. While not research, it was still evident that Nick was willing to help in any way that he could.

In his short stay, Nick contributed in many ways including successfully lowering the age average of the team to about 50. The State Planning Office's Waste Management and Recycling Program may have lost Hank Tyler to retirement to his retirement; however Nick has kept the inquisitive corner of the office alive. His team members thank our real gentleman friend for his time with us and his contribution to our efforts. We wish him success and happiness in his future endeavors, as he has won our vote of confidence and much respect.

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