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A NATIONAL NETWORK OF PROGRESSIVE ASIAN AMERICANS AND ALLIES FOR ACTION AND CHANGE



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East vs West Recycling: Bottle Bill May Help

Mon, 03/25/2013 - 19:49 Bottle Bill EPA Municipal Solid Wastes Green Hands USA Plastics Recycling TED Talks Sustainable design



Washington--Recently, I moved to a beautiful NE neighborhood. It's quiet, I can hear the birds---a symphony of them---and connect with the real stars at night. There's only one problem: litter. It collects near viaducts, protective barriers, and drainage ditches, despite the fact that both DC and Maryland have comprehensive three way recycling programs.

It's an unsightly contrast with the civic pride of place that should exist when trash disposal and waste management appears to be logistically adequate. But unfortunately, this is par norm in the United States. We buy too much that we don't need, we hate out-of-date goods, and recycle out the car window.

One positive about stateside solid waste sanitation programs these days are that they provide three-way residential disposal considerations. There is regular collection of residential trash; there is regular "single-stream" blue-container recycling service; and regular yard waste collection. Bulk trash collection (for bulky items) pickup is available by appointment.

For other wastes, there are dropoff recycling options on designated days, such as for such as household hazardous wastes or electronics ("e") toss-offs.

For busy urban residents, these recycling programs would seem to cover the ground, until, well, one notices all the trash that is still *missed*. One reason is that the trash bins of many large apartment complexes are undersized and fill up quickly. Dido for recycling bins, since business owners primarily size by square feet enclosed. (There ought to be special pick-ups when residents move out, but that would necessitate extra time and access for all three parties).

Add to this the downright litter bugs, anyone from tourists to the homeless population. Aside from the mechanized sweeper programs (for streets and sidewalks), there are no manual litter removal programs. There are a few volunteer programs in place, such as the Trash Free Potomac Network, but these litter patrols are geographically limited, and often annual events.

This contrasts strongly with what is in place in the Republic of China (Taiwan), Austria, and Switzerland where there are various incentives in place from recycling as a neighborhood activity, to an assortment of ecological trade-offs. For instance, China Economic News Service reports that "Taiwan's major contract footwear makers Pou Chen Group, Feng Tay Group, and Fulgent Sun Company have started to apply recycled materials in manufacturing sport shoes for renowned brands including Nike and Puma" (CENS, December 04, 2012).

However, the EPA's *Municipal Solid Waste* data does demonstrate that the United States has increased its effectiveness in recycling. In 2010, it was 34.1 percent, up 6 percent from 2005. The problem remains one of consistency by state and location. For instance, only ten states currently have active Bottle Bills--programs that pay 5 or 10 cents per glass, aluminum, or plastic bottle.

According to TEDTalks guest Mike Biddle, owner of MBA polymers, the plastics recycling rates are still relatively low. The researcher become plastics recycling manufacturer, conceded that there are collection and aggregation issues in the United States. Biddle's remarks included: "We need to locate our full processing plants, or at least what we call 'preprocessing plants', near the 'mines'" [processing/recycling facilities]. Biddle believes that unpredictability is an infrastructure problem impacting collector lines at the "first mile", while at the distal end, nothing is in place to arbitrate against shipping of wastes to destinations outside the United States, for instance to emerging countries which are willing to accept waste-materials (such as Africa, India, China).

Locally, even with comprehensive garbage pick-up, one can imagine how much better it will be with a Bottle Bill program. For one thing, remunerative payment on returns will spur the homeless and others to pick areas clean of the hundreds of containers littering stream banks and ditches. Another spin-off will be that, such as in California, more recycling brokers will spring up within easy walking distance for consumers, since transfer stations often have limited hours and/or are in remote locations.

According to *Green Hands, USA*: "Trash along the highway can kill when pieces of metal or other hard objects pierce windshields." Judging from the number of glass, plastic, and aluminum containers strewn in public right-of-ways in this area, the usefulness of a Bottle Bill program is indisputable. A national Bottle Bill program won't solve the rest of the litter problem, but it will be a good start.

See Related Article:

"Going Green Taiwanese Style," <http://www.apaforprogress.org/going-green-taiwanese-style>

Article research and preparation by Christine H. Wong (visit blu-geese.org for list of resources)

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