

Recycle in the Workplace

By Joni Keating

If office memos, obsolete reports, math worksheets, ad flyers, old letters, used business forms, yesterday's newspapers, or last month's magazines are being thrown in the trash in your workplace, you are missing a crucial opportunity to practice permaculture. Although this article is specifically addressing paper products, the same statement could be made about glass and aluminum products that pass through your work site.

A system in which the flow of resources is one directional CANNOT BE SUSTAINED. All too obviously, resources which exist in finite supply will simply disappear. And even renewable resources will become unavailable if their rate of renewal is outpaced by the rate at which they are exploited. At the other end of the arrow are monstrous mountains of waste - growing larger by the day. The saga of New York's unwanted garbage barge not long ago drove home the fact that we are running out of options to deal with this problem.

It is in nature that we find a system for resource use which can be sustained indefinitely. It's called RECYCLING. Indeed, one of the most concrete, easily observed, and readily imitated processes in nature is the continual recycling of all raw materials - both organic and inorganic. No specter of resource depletion. No awesome accumulation of waste.

While there are some human-made products which we have not yet found a way to recycle, we can dramatically reduce both resource waste and garbage accumulation by recycling everything that is presently recyclable. Just about everything made of paper is currently recyclable. So, as a Key operator at Alphagraphics for the past 6 months, I felt it was my personal mission to implement a paper recycling program within the shop.

What I have done is simple. There were already boxes for waste paper in the bindery, printing, and duplicating areas of the store. Having obtained verbal support from my supervisor and co-workers, I simply

found an unobtrusive, yet convenient, spot where a fourth open box could sit, designated for recyclable paper waste.

At the end of each day, the individual who counts the waste from each area transfers it to the recycling box. On the following day, before my work day begins, or whenever the shop has a quiet moment, I sort the paper into two boxes, one containing white paper only, and one containing mixed colors. Separating out the white paper in this way triples its value. These two boxes are then carried to the store's delivery van; and when enough boxes have accumulated, the whole load is taken to the nearest recycling operation.

A simple phone call will reap you all the information you need about operation hours, the value of various papers, pick-up programs offered by the company, etc. Here are a few tips I have obtained through numerous calls to my recycler:

*Coated papers - both dull and glossy - are "poisonous" and cannot yet be recycled;

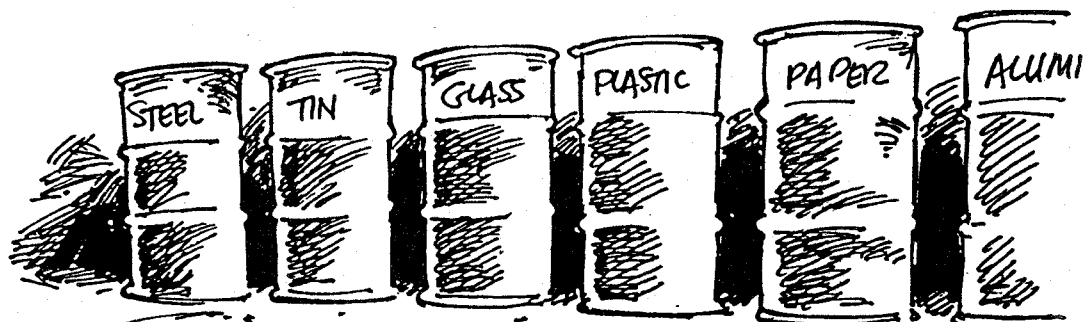
*Envelopes with plastic windows also act as a "poison" in the recycling process, though the cellophane windows do not; [Ed: You can tell the difference as the cellophane shreds easily when you pull on it; the plastic does not.]

*Some staples here and there are OK; they simply get shredded with the rest of the paper;

*White paper with colored inks on it - i.e., any ink

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At the First Annual Southwest Regional Permaculture Gathering (see page 10), we viewed a very inspiring, current, information-packed video on recycling entitled "No Deposit No Return." It is available for \$50 from No Deposit No Return, P. O. Box 427, Broomfield, CO 80020. The editor highly recommends it for education and organizing work.



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color other than black - should be sorted as colored paper if the ratio of ink to paper is high. Just to be safe I have chosen to sort all white paper with colored ink as colored paper, but you may wish to discuss a few samples with your local recycler;

*All that junk mail you receive - both at the office and at home - is recyclable; so are the insertions in your newspaper;

*The boxes and paper bags you transport your recyclable paper in are also recyclable.

The next step for me was to contact the head of purchasing for the Alphagraphics corporation to discuss the possible use of recycled paper within company stores. I encourage you to take a similar step at your workplace. The quality of recycled paper is now competitive with the quality of virgin fiber papers.

And, finally, one other action you might take to support the permaculture practice of recycling is to patronize businesses which you know are engaged in recycling their waste... and let them know that you appreciate their effort!