



CITY OF RALEIGH PUBLIC AFFAIRS DEPARTMENT

News Release

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EDUCATION CRITICAL FOR RECYCLING PARTICIPATION

Convincing people to throw out their trash has never been much of a problem for any city. Convincing people that some of their “trash” might still be usable is a bit more problematic. Getting people to actually separate their trash and those reusable materials? That’s the critical part.

Since 1989, the City of Raleigh has been actively recycling as many materials as it can in an effort to maximize natural resources, avoid putting reusable items in the landfill, and most importantly, protect the environment. What began as a once-a-month collection effort and a few drop-off centers has expanded to a bi-weekly collection schedule and dozens of special events across Raleigh. Recycling has expanded from newspapers and aluminum cans into cardboard, white goods, computers, and various types of plastic.

Getting residents to aggressively participate in the recycling program is a matter of convincing that it is in their best interests to do so. Not only are they protecting the environment they live in, they are saving their own money in the form of taxes required to operate a Solid Waste Services Division.

“I think one of the biggest obstacles we face is that a lot of people are truly skeptical that the things we ask them to put into the recycling bins get turned into new products,” said Community Education Specialist Bianca Howard. “For those folks, a trip to the Sonoco Recycling Facility at 111 S. Rogers Lane can be a real eye-opener. They see the way all of the items are separated and change their minds when they see the sheer tonnage of milk jugs, soda cans, and newspapers that we collect.”

Another factor making the education component a critical part of recycling effort is that the program is constantly improving itself. Every year, the list of recyclable materials grows. An additional challenge is that each municipality has a different list of things they collect.

“If you move here from Seattle, our list probably seems pretty small,” Mrs. Howard said. “But if you are coming from rural Alabama, it probably seems extensive. It’s all a matter of perspective. But, we are trying to always add to the list of things we collect and we require very little separation, so we’ve made it easier than it has ever been.”

To reach the broadest audience, Solid Waste Services offers several Web pages full of instructions, tips, pointers, information, and assistance that can be viewed at <http://www.raleighnc.gov/recycling>. The pages also contain links to several brochures and newsletters that help people remember their collection days, answer questions about the importance of recycling and what materials are accepted in Raleigh. Supplementing the online material, the department conducts close to 100 presentations a year to a variety of groups ranging from preschoolers to senior citizens. And in the last few years, groups requesting presentations and lectures have expanded from civic groups to corporations looking to be good stewards of the environment.

“I think ‘sustainability’ has grown a great deal as a concept that people are embracing,” Mrs. Howard said. “In the last couple of years, we’ve really seen an increase in the popularity of things like the recycling tours. It’s not just groups like the Boy Scouts asking to come and talk to us. Sororities and corporations are getting involved. Being ‘green’ definitely isn’t a fringe position.”

A busy speaking schedule for Mrs. Howard means an engaged populace. And an engaged populace is one that is willing to learn and willing to recycle.

“We definitely see more interest every year,” she said. “City-wide participation is about 65 percent and that’s trending up. We know we can do better and I think we’ll really see the fruits of that labor in years to come.”

Last year, the City of Raleigh recycled 25,205 tons of items and 17,262 tons of yard waste. The garbage total was 85,217 tons.

To learn more about the City’s Recycling efforts, visit <http://www.raleighnc.gov/recycling> or call 996-6890. The City of Raleigh collects the following items for recycling through their curbside program:

- Glass food and beverage containers;
- Food and beverage cans;
- Aluminum foil and trays;
- Plastic items #1 through #5 and #7;
- Plastic beverage rings;
- Gable top cartons (discard caps);
- Aseptic drink boxes (discard straws);
- Newspaper and all inserts (recycle any plastic delivery bags at grocery stores);
- Magazines and catalogs;
- Telephone books;
- White and colored paper, including junk mail (discard bold or neon colors);
- Shredded paper (placed inside a brown paper bag, stapled closed, and marked “shredded paper”)
- Corrugated cardboard pieces no larger than three-feet-by-three-feet in size; and,
- Paperboard, chipboard and paper tubes
- Spiral paper cans (examples include nuts, Pringles, Pillsbury)

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