



# County Conservation News

January 2011

Issue 5

## In This Issue

- Waste-ing Away
- Paper or Plastic: Neither, thanks.
- Paper: Necessary Evil?
- Waste Reduction and Purchasing Tips
- Energy Challenge Prizes announced

## Fun Links

- [EPA Waste Page](#)
- [Clean Air Council Waste and Recycling Facts](#)
- Great [Waste Reduction Tips](#)

## Contact Us

[GreenTeam@co.lewis-clark.mt.us](mailto:GreenTeam@co.lewis-clark.mt.us)

## Waste-ing Away

Some people think waste is just thrown into a big pile and then called a "landfill." It is not that simple though, landfills are highly complex structures designed by well-qualified engineers. If waste is not properly disposed of, it can have dire consequences. Toxins and deadly chemicals can leak into the ground and water table, and then contaminate our drinking water.



In 2010, the Lewis and Clark County landfill processed 41,916.71 tons of trash. That is **83,833,420 pounds of waste!** Here are some more not-so-fun facts about waste in the United States:

- The United States has only 5% of the world's population and uses 25% of the world's resources.<sup>1</sup>
- In 2008, the average amount of waste generated by each person in America was 4.5 pounds per day; 1.1 pounds of that was recycled (24%), and .4 pounds, including yard waste, was sent to composting (9%). The remaining 67% was sent to a landfill or incinerated.<sup>2</sup>
- In 2008, about 31% of municipal solid waste was containers and packaging, or **153,520,000,000 pounds**. Only 44% of that was recycled.<sup>2</sup>
- In 2008, only 23% of glass, 7% of plastics, and 21% of aluminum was recycled.<sup>2</sup>
- 42% of greenhouse gases produced by the United States are generated in the production, transport, and disposal of "stuff" ("goods" and "food").<sup>3</sup>
- Every year, Americans throw away enough paper and plastic cups, forks, and spoons to circle the equator **300 times**.<sup>4</sup>
- The average American office worker uses about **500 disposable cups every year!**<sup>5</sup>
- The beverage industry used 46% less packaging in 2006 than in 1990, even with a 24% increase in beverage sales during that time.<sup>6</sup> The average American office worker drinks 2.5 sodas per day!



## Paper or Plastic: Neither, thanks.

Every year, Americans use approximately **1,000,000,000 shopping bags**, creating **600,000,000 pounds** of landfill waste! Even worse, plastic shopping bags are not biodegradable, but instead light breaks them down into smaller and smaller pieces. These microscopic pieces of bags contaminate soil and water, and are difficult and expensive to remove.<sup>5</sup> The United Nations Environment Programme estimates that there are 46,000 pieces of plastic litter floating in every square mile of ocean. Thousands of marine animals and more than one million birds die each year as a result of plastic pollution.<sup>7</sup>



Instead of throwing away your plastic bags, find a use for them. If you have an animal, use the bag to clean up their waste. No animal? No problem. Use your plastic bags as trash bags. You might have to take out the trash a little more often but that's a small price to pay for the money you will save on trash bags and the positive impact you will have on the environment. Even better than reusing your plastic bags, buy reusable cloth bags to take with you to the grocery store.

## Paper: Necessary Evil?

Lewis and Clark County uses approximately **29,790 pounds** of paper per year. This costs the County about \$19,350. For an additional \$1,100, the County could purchase 30% post-consumer recycled paper. The following table discusses the environmental "costs" of paper with no post-consumer recycled content, 30%, 50%, and 100% post-consumer recycled content.

Quantity of Paper	29,790 lbs	29,790 lbs	29,790 lbs	29,790 lbs
Percent Post-Consumer Recycled	0	30	50	100
Wood Use	110,000 lbs	78,000 lbs	56,000 lbs	0 lbs
Net Energy	445 million BTU's	409 million BTU's	384 million BTU's	323 million BTU's
Greenhouse Gas Emissions	87,614 lbs CO <sub>2</sub> equivalent	76,622 lbs CO <sub>2</sub> equivalent	69,295 lbs CO <sub>2</sub> equivalent	50,975 lbs CO <sub>2</sub> equivalent
Wastewater	330,950 gallons	278,011 gallons	242,718 gallons	154,486 gallons
Solid Waste	28,430 lbs	25,216 lbs	23,073 lbs	17,716 lbs

Source: Environmental Defense Fund

There is a difference between recycled paper, and post-consumer recycled paper. Post-consumer recycled paper has gone through the product life cycle. It has been produced, purchased, used, recycled, and reproduced. Recycled paper is made up of waste generated during the production process. Products sometimes have percentages of both recycled and post-consumer recycled content.

---

## Waste Reduction and Purchasing Tips

Here are some purchasing and waste reduction tips:

- Buy cloth bags, reuse plastic bags, or at least recycle plastic bags.
- **Reduce, Reuse, Recycle** (in that order). Reduce the amount of stuff you buy. Reusing can save you money and is good for the environment. Reuse scrap pieces of paper for shopping lists. Reuse plastic bags as trash bags. Reuse old shirts as rags. If possible, recycle after you reuse.
- Use electronic media whenever possible. If you do need to print, use double sided printing (often found under print, properties). This will cut paper use in half.
- Consider life-cycle costs when purchasing a product. A compact fluorescent light bulb (CFL) might cost \$5 more when you buy it, but it could save you up to **\$40** in energy costs over the life of the bulb, and you will not have to replace it as much (typically, you will have to replace an incandescent bulb four times as much as a CFL).
- Buy reusable products instead of disposable ones.
- Google "waste reduction tips" for more great tips.



---

## Energy Contest Prizes

In last month's newsletter, we announced the beginning of the 2011 Energy Conservation Challenge. The challenge will run from January through June, and the goal is to reduce your building's energy usage by 10% relative to the previous two years. We told you that there would be prizes for those buildings that were able to achieve this goal. Well, the prizes have been approved and finalized. The occupants of each building that lower their energy consumption by **at least 10%** will receive a Downtown Helena gift card, accepted by nearly all downtown businesses. The amount of the gift card will be directly correlated to the amount of savings your building is able to generate. As a reminder, the county spends nearly \$550,000 on energy bills every year, so start turning off those lights, closing your blinds at night, putting on a jacket and turning the thermostat down! We will update your progress in next month's newsletter.

---

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. EPA. [http://www.epa.gov/region07/waste/solidwaste/recycling\\_overview.htm](http://www.epa.gov/region07/waste/solidwaste/recycling_overview.htm)

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. <http://www.epa.gov/epawaste/nonhaz/municipal/pubs/msw2008data.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. <http://captoolkit.wikispaces.com/Background+%26+Motivation>

<sup>4</sup> Wills, A. (2010, June 21). Recycling To-Go Plastics. <http://earth911.com/news/2010/06/21/recycling-to-go-plastics/>

<sup>5</sup> Clean Air Council. <http://www.cleanair.org/Waste/wasteFacts.html>

<sup>6</sup> American Beverage Association. "Packaging." <http://www.ameribev.org/environment/packaging/>

<sup>7</sup> [http://www.envirosax.com/plastic\\_bag\\_facts](http://www.envirosax.com/plastic_bag_facts)