

CLOSING THE LOOP ON SOLID WASTE: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Great Lakes Regional Corporate Environmental Council (GLRCEC) recommends a joint effort by Corporations and Environmental Groups to help solve the solid waste management crisis. The goal is to develop stable and long-term markets for recovered materials, including newspaper and packaging paperboard, and to reduce use of materials in product development and packaging.

The Council believes this area of the solid waste management problem has received inadequate attention by government agencies and the private waste management industries. The Council's recommended approach hopes to combine the strengths of the Council's corporate and environmental members in their ability to educate corporations and consumers about the benefits of using and buying products made from recycled materials.

The Problem and The Solutions

The status quo is changing rapidly in solid waste disposal. Specifically:

- * Guarantees of short and long term landfill capacity cannot be assured.
- * Status of existing and proposed incinerator capacity is uncertain.
- * Cost of both landfill and incinerator capacity is increasing rapidly.
- * There are few incentives for material recovery.

Creating a strong role for material recovery initiatives is becoming the dominant strategy in both the U.S. and Canada, at both the local and regional level. Under the banner of "Integrated Waste Management", this strategy strives to:

- * Maximize waste reduction, reuse, recycling, and composting as the primary means of waste management;
- * Achieve specified materials recovery, composting and source reduction goals the year 2000; and
- * Minimize dependance on landfills and incineration.

Successful transition from the status quo towards an integrated strategy is complex. Convenient material recovery services must be provided to households and businesses. Regulations, pricing/incentive systems, institutional structures and educational campaigns all must provide needed support for those material recovery services. Most importantly, markets must be identified and secured for the recycling loop to be closed.

Markets: The Final Ingredient

The balance of supply and demand for recovered materials is the central issue. The question is which should come first - the demand for recycled waste paper by mills or the supply from material recovery programs? In fact, surveys of the major newspaper publishers indicate that demand for waste paper is less than it could be because of difficulties in generating consistent supply.

The balance of supply and demand is quickly changing. Supply is increasing rapidly as material recovery programs "push" recyclables into the marketplace - driven by the incentive of avoided disposal costs. Publishers in turn are planning significant steps to increase demand. For example:

- * USA Today, which maintains the highest quality standards in the industry, has recently announced plans to print as much as 15% of their daily press run on deinked news made from old newspaper.
- * Knight Ritter, one of the largest publishers, has set a goal of printing 25% of their daily press run on newsprint made from old newspaper.

In the short-term, however, imbalances of supply and demand still persist and the price paid for old newsprint remains unstable. In the long-term, the developments cited above indicate that technical and organizational barriers to increased use of waste paper can be resolved.

Conclusions and Recommendations

To assure that Great Lakes States can rely on material recovery strategies as part of an integrated waste management approach, the GLRCEC recommends specific objectives to promote corporate and consumer awareness and action:

- * Increase the use of recycled paper fiber to assure reuse of all clean paper collected in the region and achieve a 50 percent decrease in clean waste paper going to landfills and incinerators within 10 years.
- * Establish recyclability and recycled content of products (and packaging) as criteria for new and existing product development strategies.

Corporations committed to these objectives will:

- Develop internal implementation strategies that set specific goals and time frames to increase recycled content in products and packaging, increase recyclability of products and packaging, reduce waste in the manufacture of products, and reduce packaging.
- Implement internal paper recycling programs in manufacturing plants, commercial buildings and office complexes.
- Increase use of recycled paper products in office communications, letterhead and stationery.
- Increase use of newsprint made from at least 25 percent old newspapers.
- Increase use of recycled paperboard in product packaging.

- Educate employees on the importance of purchasing products in packages made from recycled fiber.
- Voluntarily participate in standardized product identification and labelling systems to enhance recyclability and identification by consumers.

Consumers committed to these objectives will:

- Increase demand for recycled packaging and recyclable products by preferential purchasing - "buy recycled".
- Support corporations', major retailers' and supermarkets' use of recyclable packaging and adoption of packaging reduction initiatives.
- Ask supermarkets and retailers to recycle, and to reduce waste.
- Ask retailers and supermarkets to encourage their wholesalers, suppliers and manufacturers to reduce packaging and utilize recycled and recyclable packaging.
- Ask retailers to print advertising and newspaper inserts on recycled paper.
- Participate in municipal and private waste reduction, recycling and composting programs.
- Purchase products made from durable materials.