

S.B.

## THE STORY BEHIND PENN STATE'S RECYCLING PROGRAM

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From the early 1970's through 1989, students (most of whom were in Eco-Action) donated their time to sort recyclables at the flower gardens, thus generating money for their group.

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Penn State's recycling program began in October 1989 and was partially aborted in January 1992.

- Initial cost was \$309,000. This paid for the paper barrels, container boxes and paper trays around campus, 18 dumpsters, and the dissemination of recycling information and instructions.

- The program was funded by a loan from the PSU administration. Currently, 1/3 of this amount has been paid back. All of it will be paid back by 1994.

- Annual costs are approximately \$31,000. This includes bags for the paper barrels and container boxes, and further education.

- One job was created by the program -- the driver of the paper pickup truck.

- Between 9 and 18 percent of material (by weight) was diverted from the waste stream each month.

- The actual savings between October 1989 and September 1991 was \$125,000.

- Prior to the change in the Solid Waste Authority's policy (which is discussed below), recycling paid for itself and saved the University money.
- After the change, the recycling program is costing the University money.

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The new recycling program began January 1, 1992, in response to a change in the Solid Waste Authority's policy and fees:

- From October 1989 through December 1990, the Solid Waste Authority would collect the University's recyclables at no cost and charge the University for its garbage. Hence, it behooved the University to recycle as many pounds of material as possible.

- The Solid Waste Authority calculated it was losing money because it was too costly to sort the University's recyclables. The S. W. A. is now charging \$72 per ton of garbage and \$45 per ton of recyclables, provided that the recyclables are pre-sorted.

- The Penn State administration claimed that it would be fiscally prudent to abort the recycling of newsprint, plastics and glass.

- Additional expenditures for the new program total \$80,000.
  - \$56,000 for lids for paper barrels, new container boxes
  - \$24,000 for new dumpsters, education, labels

- The "cost" of recycling is as follows:

Penn State is now paying \$22,500/year to recycle cans and paper.  
 500 tons/year x \$45/ton = \$22,500/year (Cans and paper only.)

(Note: If the University didn't recycle these items, it would be paying \$36,000 per year. By being partially environmentally responsible, the University is saving: \$36,000 - \$22,500 = \$13,500 per year.)

Penn State is now paying \$34,632/year to dispose of plastics, glass and newsprint. (481 tons/year x \$72/ton = \$34,632/year)

If the University reinstated the recycling of plastics, glass and newsprint, it would pay only \$45/ton and thus save \$13,000/year.

481 tons/year x (\$72 - \$45)/ton = \$13,000/year (Plastics, glass, and newspaper.)

The administration claims that it would cost more than \$13,000/year to pay people to sort these items, and thus it is financially prudent not to sort and recycle them. The administration claims it would take a maximum of 20 full-time workers to sort these items.

If we can find a way to sort this material for less than \$13,000/year, the administration would reinstitute a full recycling program.

### OUR PLAN:

1) Since the administration already spent \$56,000 to pay for lids for the paper barrels, there will assuredly be less contamination of these barrels in the future. Thus, the estimate of "20 full-time workers" is an overly high estimate.

2) Even fewer workers may be needed if USG would inform students as to what is appropriate recyclable material and what is not. (All efforts in the past by both USG and the PSU administration have been lame.) We could start by placing a half-page (recyclable) flyer with appropriate information and a funny cartoon in every mailbox on campus. We could follow this by holding a press conference announcing the new policy, followed by placing advertising in The Daily Collegian, followed by writing a creative letter to the editor announcing the program.

3) Pay 16 students a stipend of, say, \$800 per year to sort the plastics, glass and newsprint on a regular basis.

CREATE NEW WORK-STUDY [TALK TO DR. MEL KLEZ]

4) If 16 students aren't enough, relocate some of the more expendable work-study positions to "recyclable sorting" positions.

Clearly, there are many work-study positions around campus where one student could do the job of the three students who are getting paid to do it. (For instance, work-study positions at library check-out desks.) Obviously, if students are sorting recyclables they won't be able to study, and thus the positions wouldn't be "work-study positions" anymore but rather "work positions." Many students would prefer to sort recyclables rather than sitting at a desk. Although the idea of converting a work-study position to a work position may be unappealing, we should keep in mind that these are difficult economic times and some sacrifices need to be made.

5) If, for some reason, the conversion of work-study positions to work positions is found to be completely unacceptable, then the administration could simply relocate work positions instead. Oftentimes in the HUB Cellar, for instance, one person will be making a hoagie while three people stand back and watch. If we care enough about recycling, we could easily relocate some of these extraneous positions.

6) If all the above suggestions still don't provide enough paid workers, we should keep in mind that students have volunteered to sort recyclable for free for years. Surely there are hundreds of students (Eco-Action, Lion's Share, Volunteers in Action and desultory previously uninvolved students) who would gladly volunteer some time to expedite this project. We all know someone who adamantly believes in improving the Earth's environment.

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It has been suggested that these "recyclable sorting" positions would constitute janitorial work, and thus the labor union at Penn State would have jurisdiction over them. If the union objected to the program, however, it would be taking a politically unpopular anti-environmental stance. If the union actually decided to take this stance and disallow the program, we could always remedy the situation by giving them bad press.

In the long run, the University should purchase recycling boxes with ten holes on top. Under each hole should be a bag to catch the following:

- newsprint
- computer paper and white paper
- mixed office paper
- clear glass
- green glass
- brown glass
- plastics
- aluminum cans
- other metals
- non-recyclable garbage

We'd like to note that 61% (by weight) of Penn State's recycled material in 1991 was newsprint. At the very least, the administration should not have discontinued its recycling. (We consider any suggestions that The Daily Collegian should recycle its own newspapers to be asinine at best. To demand that The Daily Collegian collect its own

newspapers is analogous to demanding that Pepsi collect its own cans, Molson Golden collect its own bottles, and so on. Once an environmentally safe product is produced by a manufacturer, it is the consumer's responsibility to complete the recycling process.)

In closing, we'd like to quote some chilling statistics:

*"Seventy percent of the waste in the United States is put into landfills. Landfills are closing at a rate of two per day. In three years, 10% of the current landfills will be closed."*

-- Garbage magazine

Approximately 50% of our waste can be recycled. We need to get serious. It isn't just environmentally beneficial to recycle. It's a necessity.