

The Truth about Recycling

by Genevieve George for the *Broomfield Enterprise*, February 2006

A number of common recycling myths have been floating around out there lately, so I thought I'd take the opportunity to address them so there is a better understanding of the larger benefits of recycling and how the Broomfield community can play an important role in conserving our resources—both environmental and economic.

MYTH #1:

It's cheaper to throw stuff away than to recycle it. Landfills are more cost-effective than recycling options.

FACT: Landfills cost more to society than just what you pay to dump. Landfills leave behind a toxic and costly legacy of polluted groundwater and squandered resources. Modern landfills must be monitored and maintained in perpetuity at the expense of local taxpayers. We can look to nearby Marshall Landfill to see how costs multiply when things go wrong. Since its closure in 1983, the toxins leaking from Marshall Landfill have earned it designation as a Superfund site. Taxpayers have shelled out more than \$4.5 million in cleanup costs and the liability for monitoring and cleanup remains indefinitely.

By contrast, properly designed recycling programs are not only cost-competitive with landfills, they also provide net benefits to society. Recycling and reprocessing prevents pollution on both ends by first reducing the need to extract virgin resources and second, avoiding the pollution caused by landfilling.

Myth #2: Landfills are safe.

FACT: The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has publicly acknowledged that all landfills will eventually leak. The substance that leaks is a 'garbage juice' called leachate, which contains toxic and hazardous pollutants that forms and drains from beneath a landfill and contaminates soil and water. It's not just what leaks from the bottom; what is emitted from the top also creates a problem. Landfills are the #1 source of human-generated methane, a greenhouse gas that is 21 times more potent than carbon dioxide.

Myth #3: There are no markets for recyclables.

FACT : The demand for recycled materials is at an all time high, and in many cases, is exceeding the supply currently generated by the American public. As the local recycling processor for the past thirty years, Eco-Cycle can attest to the fact that there have never been more markets for more types of materials than there are now, and more recycling opportunities arise every year. This industry growth happens in spite of the fact that public investments currently subsidize throw-away systems like landfills. In communities where the public planning has supported recycling systems, the growth is much faster and the benefit to the community far greater.

Myth #4: Recycling causes more pollution than it prevents.

FACT: Manufacturing with recycled materials dramatically reduces the air and water pollution created during virgin resource extraction. According to the EPA, at our current national recycling rate of 30%, we are saving the equivalent energy use of 6.5 million homes and reducing greenhouse gases comparable to taking 25 million cars off the road each year. On a smaller scale, recycling 100 tons of aluminum compared to landfilling saves the energy equivalent of more than 3500 barrels of oil.

These are just a few of the common truths about recycling. Stay tuned for more truths in next month's column.

Genevieve George is the Eco-Cycle's Broomfield Community Outreach Coordinator. To learn more about recycling or the Broomfield Recycling Center, call (303) 404-2839 or e-mail genevieve@ecocycle.org