

## **The Truth about Recycling: Part 2**

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

Last month's column addressed four of the more prevalent recycling myths floating around. This month we'll take a look at four more. With the recent changing of seasons (and Earth Day around the corner-April 22), it's a great time for these recycling myths to be broken down.

### **Myth # 5: Recycling doesn't save natural resources.**

**Fact: Every last bit of recycling makes a difference in protecting our valuable natural resources.** By using natural resources that have already been harvested, recycling conserves timber, water and minerals as well as preventing pollution. Using the National Recycling Coalition's environmental savings calculator, the collection of 135.42 tons of recyclables at the Eco-Cycle/Broomfield Recycling Center for the month of January 2006 yielded savings the equivalent of 777,910 gallons of water, 1,889 trees saved, 549,332 kilowatt hours of energy, 6,845 pounds of air pollutants and 1,473 cubic yards of landfill space saved. And that was in just one month!

### **Myth # 6: Disposable, lightweight packaging and products are the best use of resources.**

**Fact: Disposable, one-time use packaging and products perpetuate a dangerous, one-way system of resource extraction, consumption, and disposal while reusable packaging and products conserve resources time and again.** While a polystyrene coffee cup is very lightweight and easily transported, resources are extracted with every cup. Your reusable coffee mug can be reused thousands of times, preventing resource extraction with every refill. While it is true that plastic bags are lightweight and easily transported compared to paper bags, the use of canvas bags avoids the continued production, transport, and disposal of plastic bags and continually conserve resources.

### **Myth # 7: We are not running out of natural resources.**

**Fact: Non-renewable resources cannot be replaced once consumed and renewable resources can become non-renewable if overharvested and mismanaged.** By recycling products made from non-renewable resources such as plastics, which come from petroleum, we can extend the life of these resources. By recycling products made from "renewable resources," such as paper made from trees, we can prevent the damage caused by timber harvesting and habitat destruction and promote sustainable ecosystems.

### **Myth # 8: If recycling makes sense, the free market will make it happen.**

**Fact: Actually, the market isn't free now since substantial subsidies go to waste, not recycling. Long-standing subsidies created 100 years ago to shift our economy from an agricultural base to an industrial base favor raw material extraction and landfills.** According to the Welfare for Waste report (1999) U.S., taxpayers pay an average of \$2.6 billion in direct subsidies for resource extractive and waste disposal industries. These antiquated subsidies made sense in a time of vast resources and a small population, but the tables have turned—now we have a large population exerting growing

pressures on dwindling resources. Shifting these subsidies and creating an even playing field for recycling to fairly compete would result in a shift in spending and priorities that would encourage the use of recovered resources.

So while you may be fooled by other urban myths and slights of hand this April Fool's Day, the value of recycling is not to be doubted. And, with Earth Day right around the corner, keep your eyes open for upcoming workshops and events happening at the Drop-Off Center and throughout the county to celebrate recycling and all things environmental.

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