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THINKING 'OUTSIDE' THE BAGS AND BINS

Nature has been entrusted to our care and we must protect it. Those who recycle, repurpose, and reuse do so in stewardship. Recycling is an act of responsibly and carefully managing our natural resources and protecting the environment. But, are we really recycling with intent?

When we recycle, are we acting in stewardship, or are we disposing of trash in a way to ease our conscience? If we purchase a recycling bag, but fill it with non-recyclables and soiled items, is it mindful conservation or simply just removing discarded items from our personal space? If we entrust our recyclables to service providers who seemingly never recycle them, have we justifiably contributed to the reduction of refuse on our soils and in our waterways? If we recycle as a community, but we do not accurately report our efforts to receive the necessary support for existing and new conservation initiatives, have we been rewarded for our efforts?

Anything worth doing is worth doing well. If a decision has been made to recycle, it should be done with purposeful intent to act in stewardship of our natural resources. To be mindful of this process, place locally accepted recyclables that are clean and free of debris and food particles into bags and bins. Otherwise, the items are deemed contaminated, the efforts have been in vain, and those materials go straight to the landfill. ***Putting them in a bag or a bin labeled as 'recycling' does not simply make it so.***

After doing the work of sorting and preparing these recyclables, entrust them to a service provider that is actively recycling them. Learn what service providers are accepting, the associated fees that go along with these materials, and how and when these items are collected. It is a delicate process and we must be able to plan accordingly. A facility with weathered or accumulated stacks of materials indicates recyclables are not efficiently utilized. As with any service rendered, recycling service providers should retain receipts indicating the date of collection, materials collected, and weights. This allows for accurate reporting of the community's recycling participation and will greatly benefit the efforts to show the need for increased community recycling & clean-up opportunities and expanded service considerations.

Recycling is not simply the act of placing unwanted items in a bag, or a bin, or making a Saturday drop off. It is an act of stewardship of our natural resources and protecting our environment. When it is done haphazardly at any level, it is reduced to a mindful act of making trash.

Outreach on this topic has been a joint effort between the Juniata County Conservation District and the Perry County Conservation District. To learn more about recycling, contact the Juniata County Conservation District at 717-436-8953 ext. 5, Juniata County Solid Waste Management at 717-436-7729, the Perry County Conservation District at 717-582-5138 or visit www.perrycd.org, or speak with a local recycling provider.

Also, featured in a news article released on July 11, 2022 by Resource Recycling, it was reported that

prices have collapsed for bales of recovered plastics, an overall decrease of 30%. It is a trend that the global market has seen continuously this year. The full article can be accessed at this link:

<https://resource-recycling.com/recycling/2022/07/11/prices-collapse-for-bales-of-recovered-plastics/>

The prices listed online are reported through the Secondary Materials Pricing (SMP) Index. This pricing represents what is being paid for post-consumer recyclable materials in a sorted and baled format, and then picked up at most major recycling centers. But it is not just plastic that has taken a hit. The national average price of aluminum cans dropped by 16% and steel cans dropped by 13%. However, the fiber markets are seeing an increase in value. These materials are corrugated cardboard containers, mixed paper, office paper, and residential paper. The global markets are always in some type of flux, and this dynamic does contribute to how recycling systems operate. It seems to impact rural areas much harder than more populated communities for the simple fact that service providers are few to begin with.

Also, to clear up some confusion about why some communities have greater opportunities to recycle than others is because it comes down to population density. According to Pennsylvania State Law Act 101, this mandates recycling in municipalities with populations over 10,000 and those with populations between 5,000 and 10,000 that have population densities greater than 300 persons per square mile. At present, 472 of Pennsylvania's 2,628 municipalities are mandated to recycle and provide curbside collection programs. These municipalities collect yard and leaf waste and at least three materials from a menu of eight material options: steel/tin and aluminum cans, plastics, clear and colored glass, office paper, newspaper, and corrugated cardboard from residents. They also provide recycling education and enforce their own recycling ordinances. Non-Mandated Communities are not required to recycle, although 649 across the state have a voluntary curbside program, of which 298 are mandated by their local ordinances.