

Recycling Center wants curbside service

By ADRIANA REYNERI
STAFF WRITER

Every month or so Ed Bodenhofer, 74, brings about 400 pounds of aluminum cans to the Ecology Action Recycling Center in Live Oak.

Each load, which is worth about \$100 and fills Bodenhofer's pickup truck to overflowing, helps the retired chef earn money for a charity that helps feed some of the world's hungry.

Bodenhofer, of Santa Cruz, is a regular contributor to the Ecology Action Recycling Center, a non-profit venture started by volunteers 15 years ago. But if things work out the way the recycling center's governing board hopes, Bodenhofer and others like him won't have to make trips to the center, but will instead have the material picked up at the "curbsides" in front of their homes or businesses.

"The center is sort of one of the last remnants of an era, the old environmental movement," Tom Burns, a member of the center's governing board and an employee of the Santa Cruz County planning department, said.

Ecology Action's governing board is preparing for changes that could ultimately phase out the recycling operations at the center.

Ecology Action sits on a little more than an acre at 17th Avenue and Brommer Street. It consists of a recycling yard filled with dumpsters, sheds, bins, balers, and compacters, and a ramshackle one-story building that houses an office and a cement-floor lunchroom.

The lunchroom contains overstuffed furniture, a gas stove, a white enamel sink, refrigerator, and wood stove. Shelves filled with empty beer cans bearing a variety of foreign and domestic labels run along one wall. A lead-colored cat, left by one recycler, sleeps in one of the easy chairs in the afternoons.

"Everyone here is pretty high consciousness," Laurence Boomer, who's worked for the center since 1979, said.

The center accepts mixed glass, which is melted down and reused, wine bottles (there are seven standard shapes) that can be recycled as is, unwaxed cardboard, and motor oil.

It will buy flattened aluminum for 22 cents a pound, unflattened aluminum for 17 cents a pound, clean computer paper for 3 cents a pound, clean white office paper for a penny a pound, and clean newspapers for a half-cent a pound.

Car batteries bring 50 cents apiece.

The center also keeps a bin for egg cartons. The workers



The Ecology Action Recycling Center accepts everything, including the kitchen sink, that may be reusable

Photos by Adriana Reyneri

can't recycle them, but they save them for people who like to sell their own eggs, Boomer said.

REFERENCE

GREEN SHEET
June 5, 1985

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About 120 to 150 tons a month of solid waste go through the center each month, Gary Wilens, operations manager, said.

Wilens has worked at the center for four years. "I felt like doing something that I felt good about," Wilens said.

But, the center only recycles about 1 percent of the solid waste generated in Santa Cruz County, Wilens said. The small percentage is one of the reasons the board feels it's time for change.

The board believes it's time for recycling to play a major

role in solid waste management in Santa Cruz County. It's moving to support one of the newer trends in recycling: a collection service that picks up newspapers, glass, bottles and motor oil at people's homes. In other areas, curbside-recycling programs have succeeded in reaching a higher percentage of households than the current center could reach with its limited space and budget.

"I think that's the way recycling has to go," Wilens said.

Boomer adds, "If we were actually doing 50 percent, this yard would be a traffic jam."

Despite changes in attitudes and trends, the center continues to receive the strong community support it enjoyed from the start. Nonetheless, members of Ecology Action's governing board have decided the center may have begun to outlive its usefulness.

"Ecology Action was established in 1970 for the purpose of raising public consciousness and to promote recycling in the community," Burns said. "We feel the idea of recycling has

become institutionalized. It's time for us to move onto the next phase, which is primarily working on an educational level."

In the days of government enthusiasm for environmental causes, the center received federal, state and county funds.

Most of these sources have dried up, although Santa Cruz County continues to give the center about \$40,000 a year.

But there's no guarantee the county will continue its support, Kit Anderton, board member and owner of Woodstove and Sun in Santa Cruz, noted.

The board wants to make sure the center, which has always counted every nickel and dime, can survive without county funds, Anderton said.

It decided to sell its property, valued at \$300,000, lease the land back for a year or more, and use the money it gains from the sale to promote curb-side recycling.

The sale is currently in escrow. The escrow agreement would allow the center to lease the land through December 1986, Anderton said.

The center plans to focus its efforts on a curbside program taking place now on an experimental basis in Live Oak, Burns said.

Almost a year ago, Santa Cruz County began a two-year pilot curbside-recycling program in the area between the cities of Capitola and Santa Cruz, on the ocean side of Highway 1.

Central County Garbage Co. trucks pick up recyclables every other week on the regular trash day. These recyclable materials are sold directly to centers that specialize in the various materials.

At the end of the first year of the trial, an average of 20 percent of the residents are now participating, said Dan DeGrassi, a senior county planner.

The county hopes to have 35 percent involved by the end of the second year, DeGrassi said.

But at least 50 percent participation is needed if the program is to break even, Lou Chelone, a partner in Central County Garbage, said.

The Live Oak curbside program so far has collected about 500,000 pounds of glass, metal, newspaper and motor oil, Chris Hirsch, publicist, said.

But this amount seems small when compared to the 100 tons or more Central County Garbage collects daily, Chelone said.

So far this year, costs have outpaced revenue by \$40,000, Chelone said.

"There's just not enough people interested in doing it. The obstacle is educating the people," Chelone said. "There are people who are interested and really want to do it and there are people who couldn't care less. I guess there's more who couldn't care less."

The county has agreed to cover the garbage company's losses during the experiment. After two years, it will reevaluate the program, DeGrassi said.

The Ecology Action board hopes, by teaching more people about recycling, to help make the curbside experiment in Live Oak more successful.

"We believe with a high level of public participation, we can bring those costs down considerably," Burns said.

County planners, as well as members of the Ecology Action board, add that recycling serves many purposes, and making money isn't necessarily the primary one.

"It's (recycling) an unprofitable business. You lose on it every year. It really has to be looked at as a service that's part of the solid-waste disposal system," Anderton said.

DeGrassi said, "It's (recycling) basically waste disposal. When you take your garbage to the dump, it doesn't pay for itself either."

"It's an alternative form of waste disposal. There's always going to be a public cost, just like there is for landfill, just like there is for sewage."

Recycling, however, has several advantages, DeGrassi said. It saves landfill space, and spares the energy and resources it would take to make new products.

"Recycling programs generally are subsidized in one way or another, but if you look at the larger economic picture of avoided cost it does appear to be a little more economically feasible," Burns said.

The county has not yet determined how to finance the curbside recycling subsidy, DeGrassi said. The supervisors could budget money for it, or could collect money through a surcharge on garbage collection.

"The benefits are really tied to the landfill (the traditional dump sites) and that relates back to all users of the landfill," DeGrassi said.

The Ecology Action board would like to see the program expand. A county-wide curbside recycling program would be "a major step" in reducing the amount of solid waste going to landfill, Burns said.

"We're rapidly approaching capacity at our existing landfills," DeGrassi said, adding that it will be "very difficult" to develop other landfills than the ones, such as the county dump on Buena Vista Road, now being used.



Ed Bodenhofer, 74, helps workers at the Ecology Action Recycling Center in Santa Cruz sort about 400 pounds of cans that he's collected to help raise money to feed the world's hungry.