

Recyclers gear up

Curbside program begins here in August

By CHELA ZABIN
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Watsonville's curbside recycling program is scheduled to begin the first week in August.

Two trucks and a forklift have been purchased, along with blue and gray recycling containers, which will be passed out in July to each household that has weekly curbside garbage pickup. Apartment complexes will get 90-gallon containers, which will be set out near their trash bins. The recyclables will be picked up on the same days as garbage pickup.

The containers are regular 20-gallon garbage cans. One will be for newspaper and any cardboard that isn't waxed, including cereal boxes and egg cartons; the other will be for aluminum cans, plastic bottles and jugs, and glass. Heavier plastic bottles and jars, like those that contain shampoo, mustard, catsup and cooking oil, won't be taken, and neither will bottles that contain hazardous materials like pesticides.

Containers for used motor oil won't be passed out, but they will be available for free at stores that sell motor oil. Oil filters will also be picked up, provided they are drained as thoroughly as possible and placed hole-side up in the oil filter box.

The city's recycling committee, a core group of 12 people who have been working on setting up the program since October, will send fliers and letters to each household giving the specifics of what can and can't be recycled. T-shirts have been printed and educational materials distributed at community events. Volunteers are being recruited to go door-to-door to talk to residents about the program. About 40 have signed up.

Dennis Osmer, the chairman of the committee, said the city won't be coming down hard on people who put the wrong things in their containers. Those collecting the recyclables will simply leave what they can't



Mike McCollum

Wearing new recycle T-shirts are, left to right, City Manager Steve Salomon, public works secretary Deborah Salce, public works engineer Marcela Tavantzis, Fire Chief Gary Smith, public works secretary Carol Thomas, and Councilwoman Betty Murphy.

take.

Osmer said the main purpose of the program is to divert as much as possible from the landfill — as required by a new law — and that the city intends to make recycling as convenient as possible for residents. For example, he said, many of the residents at Bay Village said they thought the 20-gallon containers are too big. It was agreed that the city would pick up their recyclables in any container the residents wanted.

The committee has set up an "answer line" for people who have questions about the recycling program or who want to volunteer. The number is 728-6094.

There will be no charge for recycling pickup, although the committee is hoping the city will

change its garbage-fee structure to encourage recycling. Each household is charged now for three cans, even if it uses only one. The committee would like to see the structure changed to a per-can rate, so households pay less if they fill fewer cans.

The recyclable pickup would remain free, so it would benefit households to recycle as much as possible. A rate study is now being done by the city.

The work of the committee will not be over once the curbside pickup program begins.

The first order of business in September will be work on a program for collection of yard waste, which makes up a large portion of the waste that goes to the landfill, Osmer said.

He also said the committee

will approach the City Council with some recommended legislation, including an ordinance that would make the recyclables the property of the city once they are set out in the containers to prevent scavenging, and another to make it unlawful to contaminate the recyclables with garbage, or to dispose of hazardous or infectious waste in regular trash cans.

The most common form of household infectious waste is plastic diapers, Osmer said. The committee will suggest that the city not stringently enforce such a code, since there is no alternative way to dispose of the diapers, but rather view it as an incentive for people to switch to cloth diapers. Plastic diapers also make up a huge portion of the waste that goes to the landfill.