

Ecology Less trash flow, more cash flow

Ecology Action auditing aims to help businesses, environment

By DAN WHITE
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SANTA CRUZ — Save money, lighten your dumpster, and help the environment too.

That's the selling point of Ecology Action of Santa Cruz's new "Waste Away in Monterey Bay" program. Its auditors will examine the trash flow and cash flow of businesses, and show how to reduce waste and save money.

A business with 20 people can spend \$300 to \$500 a month on trash hauling, said Victor Aguiar, research director for the private non-profit group. "There is the potential to cut that in half."

A 1989 state law requires cities and counties to halve their waste production by the year 2000.

The 25-year-old Ecology Action has a \$250,000 budget and a seven-member staff. It produces guides telling where to recycle and buy recycled goods in the county, runs home composting workshops and distributes composting bins. It uses a combination of private and public funding.

Ecology Action members will begin offering audits in January. Since October, it has begun three audits for free as part of its training and pilot program.

Each consultation takes about two weeks and requires two to six hours of time from the business.

Aguiar said Ecology Action may eventually charge for audits. He could not estimate what the cost might be, he said.

The organization is able to offer the audits because it recently raised \$40,000 from private sources, Aguiar said, and received an additional \$45,000 in local, state and federal funds.

An example of the programs recommendations, Aguiar said, is restaurants are encouraged to use reusable bowls, plates and coffee cups.

"When you make recommendations, you have to make sure it's feasible for the business," he said. "Do they have the equipment in place? Do they have a dishwasher? Every audit will have a cost-benefit analysis. What will it cost to put this in place and how much will you save, if anything?"

"A lot of businesses are forced to do the bottom line," said Jeffrey Smedberg, recycling programs coordinator for Santa Cruz County. If being environmentally responsible "is also cost-effective, they are not going to waste any time doing it," he said.

More than half the trash hauled to Santa Cruz County dumps comes from business and industry, Smedberg said.

Another part of Waste Away is a materials-exchange program. That program matches compatible businesses. The idea is to find one business that could use materials that another company is tossing out. "One business's trash is another's treasure," Aguiar said.

For example, National Stock Sign Co. was throwing out 2-by-3-foot plastic sheets each month until it made a recent discovery.

The Santa Cruz company has a contract to put colors and designs on bike helmets. The helmets are shipped to the company wrapped in the protective plastic.

Kirkpatrick said the company was matched with another company that could use the sheets to separate soil



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

Ted Sanchez and Paul Flood pack discarded plastic for reuse.

and gravel in road construction, Aguiar said.

Ecology Action auditing Palookaville, a Santa Cruz nightclub, and The Camp,

a drug and alcohol rehabilitation center in Scotts Valley.

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