

ENVIRONMENTAL BRIEFS

A Quarterly Review of News About Vinyl and the Environment

Sorting it Out in the Big Apple. Automatic sortation of vinyl bottles has hit the big time in the Bronx, where a new polyvinyl chloride separator was recently installed at R2B2 Recycling Co. to develop a stream of one million pounds per year of recycled vinyl. Vinyl bottles will be collected from eight sites on the East Coast, and the end-product will go to vinyl resin suppliers such as Georgia Gulf, which sponsored the machine. Built and installed by Asoma Instruments (Austin, TX), the \$43,000 machine can sort up to five bottles per second. A scanner identifies vinyl bottles by their chlorine content and blows all other plastic bottles from the stream. (*Recycling Times*, March 24, 1992)

More Sorting in the Empire State. A system developed by Automation Industrial Control will be used to separate mixed plastics at North American Plastics Recycling Corporation in Fort Edward, NY. The model project, sponsored by the Partnership for Plastics Progress, will sort by color and resin type the "third bale" plastics — the plastics portion of the municipal solid waste stream remaining after soda bottles and milk jugs are removed. Preliminary tests have shown the system is capable of detecting and sorting the mixed plastics with an accuracy rate of greater than 99 percent. According to the Partnership, the pilot project will be open to interested parties for at least a year, and the information and technology will be made available when research and testing is complete. (*Waste Recovery Report*, March 1992)

Vinyl Recycling on the Rise in U.S. Communities. Approximately 1,200 communities have access to vinyl plastics recycling, according to the most recent survey of U.S. municipal recycling coordinators and solid waste managers. The survey, conducted by R.W. Beck & Associates on behalf of the Council for Solid Waste Solutions, identified those communities with access to plastics curbside, drop-off or buy-back programs. The state of New York leads the U.S., with more than 360 communities offering access to some type of vinyl recycling program. Minnesota has the second largest number of communities with access to vinyl recycling — nearly 200. Only nine states were identified as having no access to vinyl recycling.

From Packaging to Home Improvement. Paneling sheets made of vinyl scrap recycled from press-through and blister packaging applications have become the newest home improvement trend in Germany, according to *Films*, the environmental newsletter of Hoechst AG. The scrap vinyl is recycled into watertight, corrosion resistant, soundproof, flame resistant sheets suitable for uses ranging from kitchen and bathroom construction to patio enclosures and balcony covers. A definite plus for do-it-yourselfers, the recycled vinyl sheets can be worked using ordinary tools. The recycling project was initiated by the PVC and Environment Trade Association, and has been successful largely because, until now, this type of watertight sheet didn't exist.

Another Construction Use for Recycled Vinyl. Another recycled vinyl product recently introduced is an interlocking floor tile called Eco-Tile. The tiles, marketed by Global Recycled Products Inc. (Kittery, ME), come in five colors and are made of 80 percent industrial and 20 percent post-consumer vinyl scrap. Currently, the tiles are manufactured in Belgium, but plans are underway to produce the tiles in the U.S. if sufficient demand is demonstrated. Much of the colored vinyl scrap used to produce the tiles comes from Eastern Europe, where low labor costs allow for hand-sorting by color. Once the colors are separated, a master batch is added to achieve color consistency. (*Plastics News*, February 10, 1992)

Hail Clouds' Silver Lining? Since a bad hail storm battered the city of Calgary, Alberta, last September, the Plastics Factory, a local recycling company, has been working hard to recover and recycle the considerable amount of storm-damaged vinyl siding being removed from city homes. So far, the biggest problem isn't finding a use for the material, but rather keeping the vinyl scrap out of the city's landfill. The Plastics Factory hopes to educate the public, especially contractors, that the material can be recycled. The company has a customer who uses the recycled vinyl to make piping for central vacuum systems. The City of Calgary's waste management office is also helping by alerting those contractors who call for assistance that there are alternative uses for the recovered siding. (*Calgary Herald*, February 4, 1992)

Curbside Recycling Feeling the Squeeze. The hard-to-ignore fact of economics is rapidly replacing waste diversion and community participation as the biggest issue in curbside recycling, according to a recent survey of the nation's solid waste managers and recycling coordinators conducted by Alcoa. Nearly 42 percent of existing curbside programs rely on government grants for a significant portion of their funding, and, for a third of these, state grants represent more than half their total

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The Vinyl Institute is a national trade association representing the leading U.S. manufacturers of vinyl, vinyl feedstocks and additives, and vinyl film and sheet products. The Vinyl Institute is a division of SPI, The Society of the Plastics Industry, Inc.

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revenue. Still, more than half of all curbside programs—53 percent—are operating at a loss. While respondents pointed to product and packaging manufacturers and municipal, state and federal agencies as groups that should share responsibility for funding, 50 percent called on consumers to help curbside programs break even. (*Food & Beverage Marketing*, January 1992)

Suffolk County Finds Plastics Aren't So Bad. In the dark age of 1988, environmentalists heralded the passing of a landmark law banning a host of plastic products from shopping bags to foam takeout cups in Suffolk County, NY. In the reality of 1992, the Suffolk County legislature voted to block the majority of the ban, and left few environmentalists feeling sorry about it. When passed as the first U.S. law of its kind, the ban was a rallying point for those who viewed plastics as an evil substance piling up in landfills. However, critics now realize that plastics, compacted tightly in a landfill, are no different than paper packaging. Rather than bans on materials, the focus has shifted to legislation that pressures companies to reduce packaging, promote recycling and create markets for recycled products. (*New York Times*, March 5, 1992)

Recycling Has Its Limits. By the end of 1992, it is estimated the U.S. will have doubled its recycling rate for municipal waste to nearly 20 percent. However, according to J. Winston Porter, an environmental consultant and former assistant administrator for solid waste with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), we should not expect to exceed the 25 to 30 percent rate in the foreseeable future. Porter feels it is now time to examine the nation's recycling efforts and subject them to a period of evaluation. "We have made excellent progress with recycling in the past four years. It's now time, however, to subject recycling to the same tough economic and environmental scrutiny as other waste management methods." (*Solid Waste & Power*, March/April 1992)



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