



*Rochester Committee
for Scientific Information
Rochester, NY*

*RCSI Bulletin 112
Recycling Day in New York: An Overview*

*By: Byrna Weir
With End Notes by Fred Ford and Judy Braiman
March 1971*

Recycling Day in New York: An Overview

by

Byrna Weir

With End Notes by Fred Ford and Judy Braiman

Summary

Leo Cherne, Executive Director of the Research Institute of America, gave an excellent address and summarized the problem. According to him solving the solid waste problem is more complex than preparing for war and must clearly be a joint undertaking, involving the consumer, grocer, industry, rubbish collector and trash dealers. The consumer must demand minimal packaging, recycle what he gets if possible and support appropriate legislation. The remaining groups must work toward a combined method of cutting down waste and using as much secondary material as possible.

Introduction

"Recycling Day in New York", a workshop, was held at the Waldorf-Astoria in New York City, February 2, 1971. It was co-sponsored by the New York Board of Trade and the National Association of Secondary Materials Industries, with the cooperation of the Environmental Action Coalition. Government, business, industry and the public were all well represented in the presentations. The stress was on what is being done and what more must be done in recycling. There were over fifty speakers.

Government

Mayor Lindsay stated that a good environment is good economics and mentioned moves being taken in New York City to improve their situation: 1) recycling gas station oil to keep it out of the sewers, 2) a pilot project for making garbage into fertilizer, 3) recycling abandoned cars and 4) preparing new specifications for office paper and other materials purchased by city government to require a percentage of secondary materials. He pointed out the need for three things in the federal government: 1) to revise freight rates and tax rates, 2) to provide economic incentives for recycling and 3) to make the Resources Recovery Act of 1970 effective (at present it ignores the need for markets and does not have actual appropriations needed to carry it out). The public must forget the myths that scrap is bad and reused material is inferior.

Henry Diamond, State Environmental Conservation Commissioner, sees his department as a broker between the state and cities. He listed three aims and current programs to accomplish them:

1. The aim is to develop environmental facilities parks or recycling centers. Such a park is being planned, with a tax rate benefit to prove that such a park is politically and financially sound.
2. The aim is to encourage recycling of any paper possible. The state government will buy paper which includes secondary materials and cities will be encouraged to do so.

3. The aim is to make assets out of problems. A pilot project is being set up with Niagara-Mohawk, on the Hudson River, to pipe thermal waste heat through a building to keep a constant climate for raising plants and animals. Another project provides for thermal heat in a Long Island oyster bed.

Business

The U.S. economic system will continue to grow. If it were slowed down, as environmentalists suggest, there would be 11-12% unemployment. In fact, it will grow faster than in any decade in the twentieth century. Producing goods will be at least as high as providing services. Inflation generates waste and recycling can be an anti-inflation weapon.

Industry

Glass - The market for crushed glass is substantial, as there is potential use for more used glass than exists at present. The raw materials used in making glass are also abundant.

Metal - Of all steel produced in the last thirty years, 52-57% has been produced from recycled scrap, but this percentage can be increased if freight rates are changed and the public will demand less virgin material. There are only four detinning plants in the country and progress is being made in using no tin in making cans.

Paper - At present 25% of paper is recycled, industry is aiming for 35-38% and 50% seems possible, as a long-range goal. The remainder could perhaps be used in such areas as composting and cattle-feed. The Recycling Resources symbol will be used on articles containing secondary materials.

Public (Conservationist and Consumer)

Gary Soucie, Conservation Director of Friends of the Earth, pointed out several areas where the public can urge legislators to make or carry out certain recommendations. Possible concerns are:

1. The Resources Recovery Act of 1970 received no funding.
2. Mining companies could be charged for use of public land.
3. Government could specify use of materials used in products to help in recycling the products for re-use. For example, tin, aluminum and lead get mixed with steel in the manufacture of cans, so an all-steel can would make reclaiming simpler; copper, mixed with steel in the automobile, provides similar problems.

Gary Sellers, a Legal Consultant to Ralph Nader, pointed out the need for public interest advocates and made some specific recommendations which included the following:

1. The solid waste program should be administered by one federal agency not hindered by conflicting statutory obligations. It should be under the Health, Education and Welfare Department and separate from the Bureau of Mines.
2. Companies should hire zero-base economists to find out what the federal government is doing so the companies can act.

3. Government should quantify solid waste control, using zero-base solutions to determine least cost and least burden to the greatest number.

4. The individual consumer should not have to relieve business of its job, which includes recycling and bearing an increased cost of disposal. The consumer should, however, accept the responsibility of supporting proposals which work toward the greatest good for the greatest number.

Jerome Kretchmer, head of New York City's Environmental Protection Administration (a "superagency including the city's departments of Air Resources, Water Resources and Sanitation") stated two proposals he had just made (a public hearing will occur before they become laws): 1) a deposit bounty system will be imposed on glass, metal and plastic containers, with a 2¢ deposit and a 4¢ return and 2) a tax to prepay for the cost of disposal. He also has a household sorting of refuse pilot project planned. A later speaker said that household sorting could save \$10/ton of the NYC \$30/ton disposal cost.

Karen Dumont, Executive Director of the Environmental Action Coalition, commented on the need for voluntary citizens recycling materials to show the need and willingness to do this. With household waste providing 60% of municipal waste in smaller cities and 80% in suburbs, it is clear that householders can help alleviate the problem. At present there are three collection centers in Manhattan and three in the other boroughs; each is open for four hours on Saturday and glass, metal (separated into three categories, tin, bi-metal and aluminum) and paper are accepted. Information about recycling centers in the Rochester area is being issued by R.C.S.I. separately.

End Note #1:

The City of New York billed Recycling Day as the first effort of metropolitan areas to bring together all parties concerned with waste disposal. Whether or not it was a first, the city and its organizations must be commended for this concrete evidence of ecological interest.

Mrs. Weir has summarized the technical content; there was actually little in the way of revelation, as many speakers pursued the same point from another angle. The meeting was of value to me not so much for what was said, but for who said it and how. In common with many symposia, this one was notable as much for its personalities as for its content.

I was impressed by the officials who are in charge of our ecology. Henry Diamond, New York's first Commissioner of Environmental Conservation, seemed to be enthusiastic and sincere as he approached the problem. He will doubtless need the sense of humor he displayed. New York City's Jerome Kretchmer (head of New York City's Environmental Protection Administration) is a dynamic example of today's young politician looking for action (complete with long hair and sideburns). Mayor Lindsay has chosen a strong ally in Kretchmer.

There were also disappointments: the paper man who steadfastly upheld the mill's right to do business, with or without resulting pollution, and the glass man who believes bottles can only save the environment (for, after all, what's cheaper than sand?). But, on balance, Recycling Day was a success, due, in part, to the technical content which is well summarized above, but due also to the opportunity to see and hear firsthand the leaders in the field, and to exchange ideas with others with common interests in ecology.

--Fred Ford, Chairman, Recycling Task Force

End Note #2:

1. Discriminatory freight rates approved by government are factors against recycling. It costs \$4.12 a ton to ship scrap by rail and only \$1.64 to ship an equal quantity of virgin ore. This rate structure had been set in earlier days to protect the mining industry against unfair competition from scrap metal.

2. The Resource Recovery Act of 1970 authorized \$463-million in appropriations over three years to help states and cities plan and construct systems of solid waste disposal and recovery. The President requested only \$19-million in actual spending for next year, a small amount to spread over the country and the 91st Congress appropriated no funds. Neither were funds appropriated for Governor Rockefeller's Three Point Program. This program was to have developed industrial reclamation centers throughout the state.

3. Jerome Kretchmer has also called for legislation requiring manufactured products to contain a certain percentage of recycled materials.

--Judy Braiman, Chairman, Environmental Economics