

Recycling in Bowdoinham - 1990s

Bowdoinham recycling booming ahead of schedule and state goals

4 The Times Record, Brunswick, Maine — Monday, January 29, 1990



David L. Berry, Bowdoinham's manager of solid waste, installed an old hay bale conveyor horizontally in the separation room of the Post Road recycling barn, where mixed-up recyclable items

are separated for re-sale. The town has cut its dumping at the town landfill by at least 50 percent since the program started in April. (John A. Young photo)

Small town, big recycler

Kudos to Bowdoinham's recycling program, arguably the most successful such program in Maine.

Other communities may fret about meeting new state-mandated recycling goals in coming years, but not Bowdoinham, where approximately half the town's trash already is being recycled. As Maine's other cities and towns have until 1994 to recycle half their trash, it's fair to say that Bowdoinham is four years ahead of everyone else.

Two key elements contribute to the success of the town's recycling program — convenience, and financial incentives. These elements are common to successful recycling programs throughout the nation.

Convenience is essential to the success of any recycling effort. Programs that are not successful generally involve too much sorting by individuals or require too much individual initiative. That's not the case in Bowdoinham, where residents are permitted to bag glass, plastics, cans, Styrofoam, rags and household batteries together. Contents of the bags are separated into appropriate categories at the recycling center. That makes recycling easy for residents.

The program also provides financial incentives that encourage recycling. A trip to the recycling center costs nothing. A trip to the landfill, however, costs residents a dollar a bag. Thus the recycling program remains voluntary, but failure to volunteer can be a costly proposition.

Combine those two elements — convenience and financial incentives — and the result is a highly successful program. Indeed, some 40 tons of newsprint, 15 tons of glass and four tons of rags have been removed from Bowdonham's waste stream since the recycling program began in April. The amount of solid waste going into the town's landfill has fallen in two years from 250 cubic yards a week to 50 cubic yards today. Although improved trash compaction accounts for a portion of that reduction, at least half of what was once trash is now being recycled.

The state requires communities to recycle 25 percent of their trash by 1991 and 50 percent by 1994. As they grapple with ways to do so, they need look no further than Bowdoinham to see how it's done.

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JOURNAL

LOCAL

Bowdoinham begins incentives to beef up recycling efforts

By ELIZABETH COXE
KJ Correspondent

BOWDOINHAM — The town that is number one is still trying harder.

Bowdoinham leads the state in recycling efforts, already diverting more than half its mainstream solid waste, but Solid Waste Manager David L. Berry wants to do better and has some new incentives in mind.

Berry has announced a can-flattening contest with a prize from the town for the citizen with the heaviest bucket-full of clean, label free, flattened metal cans. First and second runner-up prizes also will be awarded.

Scales at the Bowdoinham Recycling Barn will be used for weighing, and Berry has a five-gallon bucket ready, so container weight will not be a factor. Can ends may be included, but may not number more than twice the number of cans.

Cans may be taken to the barn on Wednesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. until March 3.

A year-end report of the town's recycling program describes sales of materials since April last year when the current operation went into full swing.

More than 40 tons of newsprint has been sold, averaging \$15 per ton. More than 18 tons of corrugated cardboard at \$30 per ton, and 15 tons of glass at \$20 per ton also have been sold during the 8-month period.

An additional 25 tons of glass is scheduled to be moved in the spring, and 45 bales of plastic, which

will bring between \$20 and \$30 per bale, are being stored until spring.

Berry said the barn stockpiles flattened aluminum and steel containers until there is enough to market. Aluminum has a very high resale value of \$700 per ton, he said, while steel is not nearly as high but has value in quantity.

Mixed paper and magazines, because of coatings and toxic inks, are not good candidates for shredding and reuse as paper, said Berry. These materials are being stored until a market becomes available or until they can be sold as fuel stocks. About 20 tons of mixed paper and 18 tons of magazines and catalogs are being held in the Barn.

Most of the materials are sold to Maine companies, said Berry. Corrugated cardboard goes to Gardiner, newsprint to Lisbon Falls, and glass to Topsham.

Berry uses an old town fire truck — a 1952 Chevy with 10,000 miles on it — to transport the materials for sale.

Since April, when Bowdoinham started collecting fees for disposal at the landfill, materials accumulating there have averaged 50 cubic yards per week. Two years ago, the average was at least 250 yards per week.

There is no compensation for recycling, except in savings of landfill fees, but citizen participation has been high.

Citizens see the user fee concept as fair, said Berry, adding those who use the landfill most pay the most. Because of decreased dumping at the landfill, the town will be able to use it for six to eight more years, before

having to finance its closing, Berry said.

Another reason for the high participation of recycling in Bowdoinham has to do with the recycling process itself.

In most towns, separation of materials at home is the first step, and the most difficult step, for residents. In Bowdoinham, much of the separation is done at the Recycling Barn, a converted farm building that once housed chickens and pigs.

The large aluminum-sided building on Route 138, a mile north of town, is tall enough to use gravity instead of expensive sorting and moving equipment.

Modifications to the old barn included adding a third floor and large elevators. Mixed recyclables (non-paper materials) make the trip up, then are dropped through a funnel onto a second-floor conveyor belt that once functioned as a hay elevator.

Along the side of the table-height conveyor are labels of trash categories, including clear glass, brown glass, green glass, metal, aluminum, fabric and different types of plastic. A hole about two feet square has been cut on the floor under each label so sorted materials can be dropped into large bins on the first floor.

A sorter walks back and forth by the materials, separating articles and preparing some that need extra squashing.

Berry said he welcomes calls about the current contest and other aspects of the town's waste management program. He can be reached at the Bowdoinham Recycling Barn or by calling 666-3228.

REPORT OF THE SOLID WASTE MANAGER

1990-91

The Town completed has now completed it's second full year under the our Solid Waste Ordinance and I am pleased to report an ever increasing amount of participation, not only in acheiving a significant reduction in the amount of waste going on our landfill, but also in terms of the successful operation of our recycling facility.

During the past year, the Town undertook two significant composting projects. The fall composting project was performed in cooperation with the Bowdoin College Environmental Studies Department and it's purpose was to find out if mixed paper could be mixed with food waste to form a compost material that could be used as landfill cover. The resulting material was tested for both nitrogen content and heavy metals, and the nine week program was successful in providing a use for food waste and mixed paper.

In the spring, the Town underwent another nine week program using food waste, mixed paper, other compostables and fish waste for the catalyst. This program was also successful in that it showed a decrease of about 5-7 cubic yards of material per week going onto the landfill, while making a useable cover material as well.

During the past year, the Town has placed, on average, 40 -45 cubic yards of material per week on the landfill. This is a great reduction compared with the 250-300 cubic yards per week we were putting on the landfill prior to startup of the recycling program. We are presently adding another five to six years of useable life to our landfill. It is a valuable resource and I would urge everyone to continue to protect that resource.

The processing of recyclable material at the Recycling Barn on the Post Road is now becoming routine. We are shipping out glass, newsprint, plastic and corrugated material on a regular basis, all to nearby buyers. The amount of material recycled by townspeople seems to be fairly steady, and we will be

Recycling program wins state praise

By KAREN MAYO
Special to the Sun-Journal

BOWDOINHAM — State officials have commended Bowdoinham for its progress in instituting and organizing a recycling program.

"I was very impressed," said Jody Harris, director of the Office of Waste Reduction and Recycling. "The degree to which Bowdoinham has progressed is ahead of a lot of communities in the state."

OWRR Program Manager David Blocher and Planner Geoff Hill accompanied Harris on a tour led by the town's Solid Waste Manager David Berry Wednesday.

For the past eight months Bowdoinham has operated a recycling-with-incentives program. Residents are charged by volume for all items placed directly on the landfill. Established user fees include \$1 for each 30 gallon trash bag and \$5 per yard for bulk garbage.

All recyclable materials, however, may be disposed of at no charge.

Through recycling the amount of waste deposited in the landfill has been reduced from 250 cubic yards a week to approximately 50 cubic yards a week, said Berry.

During the tour, Berry outlined the procedure the facility uses for processing, sorting, baling and storing recyclables. The town, he said, has tried to keep the requirements of the program simple for residents.

Residents are asked to keep cardboard, newsprint, magazines and mixed paper separate. All other items, such as glass, plastic, tin cans, styrofoam, dry cell batteries and clothing, fall under the category of mixed recyclables and need not be sorted.

"We don't ask people to sort all their material," Berry said. "If we



KAREN MAYO photo

Michael Acerra sorts recyclables at Bowdoinham's recycling facility as (left to right) Town Manager Steven Dyer and Office of Waste Reduction and Recy-

cling officials Jody Harris, Geoff Hill and David Blocher look on.

did, there'd be a chance that it would need to be resorted again here at the facility. It makes it simpler at the home level."

As soon as possible, the sorted recyclables are sold in the local market, Berry said.

"For us right now, the best option is the direct market," he said.

The town sells newsprint directly to mills in Lisbon Falls and Gardiner. Glass is sold on a regular basis to Maine Recycling in Topsham and corrugated cardboard is sold to Yorktown Paper in Gardiner.

Berry said he is always searching for markets to sell recyclables. Re-

cently he found a buyer for styrofoam "peanuts." A company that ships packaged fish nationwide will buy any clean styrofoam peanuts the town collects, he said.

One advantage the town has over other communities is the size of its recycling facility, which is nearly 12,000 square feet in size. Items which can not be sold locally can be stored.

Tin cans are currently being stored until a large amount has been collected for shipment to the nearest buyer, in Pennsylvania.

Mixed paper and plastic are also

being stockpiled.

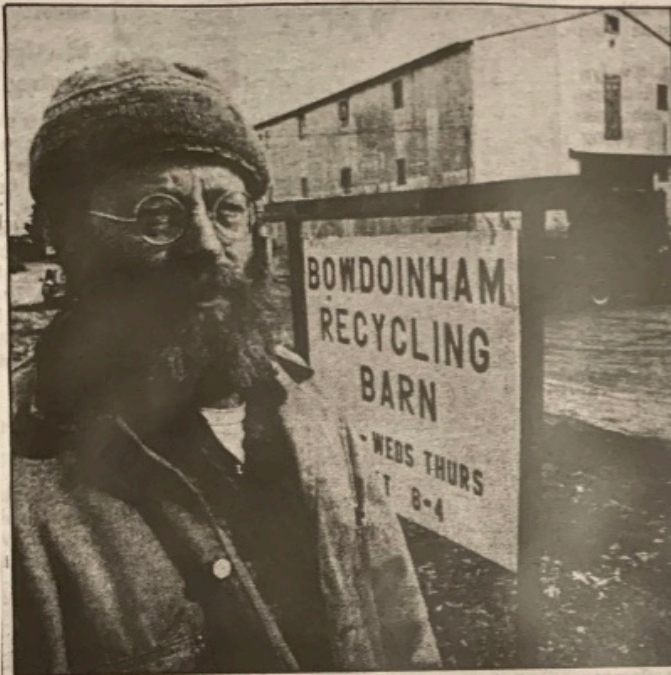
"Mixed paper currently has no market," Berry said. "It's the only thing I have no market for."

As an additional incentive to recycle, the town's Solid Waste Department is sponsoring a can flattening contest. A cash prize of \$50 will be awarded to the resident who can put the largest number of pounds of flattened metal cans in a five gallon plastic bucket.

"It's important to keep the public involved and abreast of what's going on," Berry said. "They're the ones who are making it work."

Small town adopts recycling with zeal

Portland Press Herald, Saturday, April 20, 1991



Staff photo by John Ewing
Solid waste manager David Berry spends most of his time finding markets for recyclables and working on composting projects.

● Bowdoinham's volunteers provide a challenge for reducing the state's trash flow.

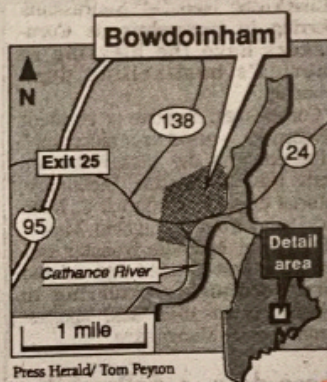
By JILL LANG
Staff Writer

BOWDOINHAM — Carol Lenna has stopped buying individually wrapped American cheese slices. Too much packaging waste, she says.

In the two years since Bowdoinham started its voluntary recycling program, the amount of trash the four-member Lenna household generates has been cut in half, to one bag per week. Beneath a butcher-block cutting board in her kitchen, Carol Lenna stores tin cans, plastics, styrofoam, glass and paper packaging.

The trash pail beneath the kitchen sink contains mostly paper towels, tea bags and coffee grounds. If she composted, Lenna says, she would generate even less trash.

"Once you start recycling, it's hard to throw things away," Lenna says, sifting through the trash to see if there's anything that can be



Press Herald/ Tom Peyton

moved to the recycling bin. Aside from a questionable ice cream container, she finds little.

According to town estimates, 80 percent of Bowdoinham's 700 households recycle, a rate that is probably the highest in the state, according to officials at the Maine Waste Management Agency. They point to Bowdoinham as an example of how a small town can recycle away its trash.

In the past two years, Bowdoinham has surpassed the state's goal

of recycling 50 percent of the trash by 1994. Doing so has allowed the town to extend the life of its landfill by several years, steering it from the current trend of sending trash to a regional incinerator such as the Maine Energy Recovery Co. in Biddeford or Regional Waste Systems in Portland.

"Bowdoinham should serve as a challenge for other small Maine communities to show that recycling can be low-budget and low-tech and still be effective," says Jody Harris, director of waste reduction and recycling for the Maine Waste Management Agency.

Local officials credit their recycling successes to economic and environmental incentives and residents' strong desire to remain self-sufficient.

Two years ago, town officials were getting ready to close the Bowdoinham landfill by 1991. Now they estimate they have another four to six years left.

The town charges \$1 per bag of trash taken to the landfill.

Recycling in Bowdoinham is voluntary because many townspeople don't like to be told what to do, says Brant S. Miller, chairman

of the town's Board of Selectmen. At the same time, Miller says, response to the recycling program has been good because Bowdoinham residents know it allows them to remain free of ever-rising tipping fees at an out-of-town disposal site.

"People in Bowdoinham are interested in going it alone, not hauling our trash elsewhere," Miller says.

At the Bowdoinham recycling center on Post Road, the most expensive piece of equipment is a \$7,000 baler. The center itself, in the true spirit of recycling, is a converted chicken barn.

Trash is sorted into hand-built wooden crates. The town's total waste budget is about \$70,000, thousands less than if the trash was sent to a regional system.

Residents are encouraged to recycle plastics, glass, styrofoam, mixed paper, rags, tin and aluminum cans and to compost food waste. Compost generated last year from a first-of-its-kind experiment using food waste and mixed paper will be used as cover for the landfill, which usually costs \$4.50



Staff photo by John Ewing

Joy and Salvacion Demers carry recyclable items into the Bowdoinham Recycling Barn.

per cubic yard. The town usually needs 16 to 18 cubic yards per week.

Two weeks ago, the town also began an eight-week composting experiment using disposable diapers, as a way to further reduce what goes into the landfill, says David L. Berry, Bowdoinham's solid waste manager.

"I'm not trying to set the world on fire with some super potting soil," says Berry. "I'm just trying to get some dump cover."

No one else in the state is trying to recycle disposable diapers through composting, says David Blocher, program manager for the Maine Waste Management Agency, who calls Berry "a recycling zealot."

Berry, a 51-year-old Bowdoinham native, is at the center of the town's recycling effort. A bearded, bespectacled bear of a man, he greets townspeople, many by name, as they arrive at the barn.

He spends most of his time finding markets for the town's recyclables or working on composting projects. When he isn't working part time as solid waste manager, Berry raises oysters on the Damariscotta River.

Since recycling started, trash production in Bowdoinham has dropped from 250 cubic yards a week to about 50.

With almost everyone in town recycling, trash hauler Hollis Temple has seen his route cut in half, to about 100 of Bowdoinham's 700 households. Some of Temple's former customers send no trash at all to the landfill, only recyclable material.

"They did a lot of grumbling at first, but most of them are following the rules right to the letter," says Temple, 79, who's been hauling trash in town for 30 years.

The decline in his business is OK, he says, because recycling is a good thing. He says the route has become more an opportunity to

socialize than a business proposition.

But a handful of residents on Temple's route still simply won't recycle.

Temple won't name them, but he notes one particularly egregious example where a household puts out seven or eight bags of trash every other week.

"Why don't they separate their trash? They're just lazy, I guess," he says, listing the ways he separates his personal trash, burns paper and junk mail in the wood stove, and puts food wastes in the woods behind his home for the animals to eat.

"In Bowdoinham, people found out there's no need of having garbage," Temple says.

