

Nichols Hills

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News

Just the Way
They Want It

HANDCRAFTED TREASURES
The Creative Side of Sody Clements

GIVING THANKS, GIVING BACK
'Tis the Season for Philanthropy



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WASTE **NOT**

By Mary Ellen Ternes

In the process of moving to a new house over the past few weeks, I began to regret all of the unwise purchases made when I moved into my old house five years ago. Perhaps the frustration of sorting through countless poor consumer choices is the perfect inspiration for writing about ways we consumers can minimize our municipal solid waste generation.

Now, before someone worries that perhaps I'm going to advocate not buying anything at a time when we're hoping consumer confidence will remain high, don't fret. I'm a consumer, too. But we can make better choices.

Minimization of municipal waste generation has been pioneered by cities in densely populated areas of the country where landfills are full and new landfill space is limited, so there is no shortage of general "how-to" guidance out there. But, you ask, if open land is plentiful in Oklahoma, why should we worry about our waste generation?

One reason is that our waste is hauled by trucks with relatively poor fuel efficiency, which contribute to the air pollution that has caused central Oklahoma to border on a violation of the National Ambient Air Quality Standards. Trucks visit our homes each week to pick up our waste – often twice a week – idling much of the time, which creates the highest pollution rates. It's difficult to justify the fuel use or the resulting air pollution from unnecessary volumes of solid waste.

There are two types of waste we can easily try to reduce: excessive packaging and yard waste. More often than not, packaging is produced simply to be disposed of, but in the

process of making it into your hands it has been transported to the site where the goods are manufactured, then with the goods to the distributor, then to the retailer, then in our cars to our homes. It ends up in the landfill because it's generally not reusable. With few exceptions, excessive packaging generally represents an expensive and carbon-intensive inefficiency in our consumption. As for yard waste... did you know that 20 percent of the waste we send to the landfill in central Oklahoma is yard waste? Why are two of every 10 bags of garbage that could be excellent compost diverted to the landfill instead?

The EPA says that between 1960 and 2007, the waste that each of us generates has almost doubled – from 2.7 to 4.6 pounds every day. That's a lot of resources that we're pitching out the window (figuratively, usually) at an unsustainable rate. The EPA promotes "source reduction" – reducing the amount of waste we generate first (before recycling), recognizing that it can help reduce waste disposal and handling costs by eliminating the costs of recycling or sending it to a landfill, and also conserving resources and reducing pollution.

In addition to learning from other cities that have pioneered source reduction, we can also follow industry's lead.



Mary Ellen Ternes

ERICK GFELLER

Living Well *Your Involvement, Your Environment*

While our municipal waste has doubled, U.S. industry has eliminated huge volumes of solid hazardous waste (compare 305 million tons of hazardous waste generated in 1991 to 46 million tons in 2007), and saved a great deal of money in the process.

We need to figure out how to be more efficient (e.g., ultra-convenient and significantly processed foods are efficient only from a time perspective, especially the single-serving sizes). Once we decide on workable and resource-efficient strategies, then we buy only what we need. When we make a decision to buy something, we need to consider whether we can reuse whatever we don't consume of our purchase, from the good itself to its packaging. If we can't reuse it and we still want it, then we should try to recycle it or compost it. And then, only as the very last resort, we bag it and send it to the landfill, where hopefully it will decompose and be recaptured as methane so that we can reuse it as natural gas. We can make better choices.

Now, here's my question: How do I avoid buying toys that consist of lots of little pieces, where the absence of a single piece renders the entire toy solid waste, and only some of which I recovered when I cleaned out the playroom in the move? Maybe I should just buy the packaging. My kids love bubble wrap (pop pop pop pop). ■

Mary Ellen Ternes, Esq. is a former chemical engineer from both the EPA and industry. She is currently a shareholder with McAfee & Taft and co-chair with Richard A. Riggs, Esq. of its Renewable and Sustainable Energy Group, and is serving a three-year term as City of Nichols Hills Environment, Health and Sustainability Commissioner.

BE INFORMED

Helpful tips on reducing the amount of waste we generate:

www.epa.gov/osw/consERVE/rrrr/reduce.htm

Tips on managing yard waste: pods.dasnr.okstate.edu/docushare/dsweb/Get/Document-2861/F-887web.pdf

EPA's waste minimization programs:

www.epa.gov/waste/hazard/wastemin/tools.htm

Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality's Land Protection Division:

www.deq.state.ok.us/lpdnew/p2index.htm

For a comparison of hazardous waste volumes generated by industry in 1991 to 2007, see the EPA's National Biennial RCRA Hazardous Waste Report (Based on 1991 Data) at www.epa.gov/epawaste/inforesources/data/br91/na.pdf and the 2007 National Hazardous Waste Biennial Report at www.epa.gov/epawaste/inforesources/data/br07/index.htm.



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