

More Municipalities Incorporating Textiles into Recycling Programs

Textiles amount to a "hidden waste" that municipalities want to address

By Heidi Ridgley

At a \$100-per-ton floor price average, textiles are steadily becoming a valuable recyclable commodity, causing municipal recycling coordinators to take notice.

Although many municipalities already collect used clothing through charity collection drives and drop-off boxes, "there's still a lot of waste out there," said Eric Stubin, vice-president of Trans-America Recycling in Brooklyn, N.Y.

According to the Council for Textile Recycling in Bethesda, Md., textile waste represents almost 5 percent of the MSW stream. Yet, end users only recycle 25 percent—or 1.25 million tons—of all post-consumer textile waste.

Consider a municipality that generates 36,000 tpy of MSW. Hidden in that amount is 1,800 tons of textile waste, according to Trans-America estimates. Just a 10 percent recovery rate could give the municipality \$18,000 for the year.

And, according to Stubin, that amount is only 2 percent of Trans-America's annual demand for textile waste.

He said his company is "an end-user with underutilized capacity," which currently processes more than 6,000 tpy of textiles.

"But textile recycling rates are increasing. At a \$100-per-ton minimum floor price, it just makes sense," Stubin said.

"When end users supply the collection boxes and do the pickups, it becomes a no-cost solution for the municipalities involved," he said.

Recently, as many as eight New Jersey communities committed to recycling textiles, collectively removing 16 tons of textile waste during each program's first three months, Stubin said.

During the first two months of the program in Bergen County, the borough recycled an estimated 15.6 tons of textile waste.

This boosted recycling revenues by 7 percent while avoiding trips to the landfill where tipping fees cost \$54 per ton, according to Robert Bartley, superintendent of the Bergenfield Public Works Department.

So far, only two drop-off boxes, maintained by Trans-America, serve 30,000 people. But Bartley is considering getting a third.

"We've just gotten started. Spring cleaning is just around the corner, and we expect our income will increase soon," Bartley said.

He said he sees textile recycling as the "way to go" because municipalities can hand money back to the tax payer with the least effort.

The only costs involve education. Bartley said his town does much of it through advertisements on already established town flyers.

Trash haulers also refuse to pick up



A Trans-America employee in New Jersey picks up textiles for recycling. The materials will be sorted, baled, and sold for \$100 per ton.

clothes and will flag bags if they notice clothes inside.

Small-scale textile recycling programs in the state, such as those established in Park Ridge and New Milford, are not the only programs in the state.

On a larger scale, Somerset, N.J.'s, program, set up five years ago, diverts 150 tpy of textile waste, according to Stubin.

"For years, no one thought of textile waste as a recyclable," Stubin said. "But as more towns realize that textiles comprise up to 4.5 percent of their solid waste, I think we will see greater awareness and participation."

He added that towns with contracts that allow them to work directly with textile end users fair better because they depend on a constant supply.