

LOCALNEWS

KOOCHICHING COUNTY

Garbage and recyclables don’t mix

Sorting out garbage costs time which equals money

BY LAUREL BEAGER
Editor

Koochiching County’s got a few thieves of public money. That public money is stolen from taxpayers who must spend extra money for the time and resources to sort garbage from the recyclable items collected in trailers around Borderland.

The problem begins when garbage is dumped in the recyclable collection trailers at the 12 sites around the county, said Dale Olson, Koochiching County Environmental Services Department director.

The Sentence to Serve crew hauls to the county Transfer Station full trailers which are dumped on the floor and the items they contain placed on conveyor belts. Crew members pull garbage from the recyclables, which are sorted into No. 1 and No. 2 plastics, tin and aluminum, and paper products.

The collection trailers have been used since 1993.

After enough recyclables are collected, they are baled and shipped to where ever the market provides the best price at the time, said Olson.

However, Olson said garbage placed in the trailers cause them to fill up more quickly, requiring them to be dumped more frequently than they were reserved for only recyclables. And it requires more time and effort to sort garbage from recy-

clables at the transfer site.

Garbage is sometimes left inside the trailers in plastic bags, which requires the bag to be ripped open, contents sorted and bag to be placed in the garbage — again requiring more time and effort than simply sorting recyclables, said Olson.

“The worst is people who put diapers and fish guts — obvious things that don’t belong there — in the trailer, and branches,” said Olson. “That costs county taxpayers money.”

Keith Knaeble leads Koochiching County’s STS program as a Minnesota Department of Corrections staff.

“More than anything, it costs us time when we have to deal with garbage,” Knaeble said.

When garbage is dumped in the trailers, he estimated it takes an extra 20 minutes to process a trailer load. The crew dumps five to six trailers a day.

“That means there’s 1 1/2 to two hours of wasted time (each day) that could be better used doing something else,” said Knaeble. “People are getting rid of their garbage for free and the county and county taxpayers are paying the tab for it. It’s theft of services more than anything.”

Knaeble said he’d like to catch more people dumping garbage in the trailers. “If we get their names, either I’d talk to them or Dale would,”

he said.

Garden waste — the tops of carrots and other vegetable waste and yard brush — continues to be placed in the paper bin in the trailer at Kmart, Knaeble said.

“For a while, they were doing it every other week,” said Knaeble. “Now, it’s only once in a while. But it is the same person, the same kind of trees and waste. I want to catch that person so bad.”

That kind of disregard for the rules and why they are in place is frustrating, said Knaeble. “People like that make me mad,” he said.

Olson said ESD staff have obtained names from inside garbage left in the recycling trailers, but taking legal action is difficult. “It’s pretty tough,” he said. “If someone gets a license, they can report it to ESD.”

He recalled finding the name in garbage left in a trailer of an STS crew member who had finished her court-ordered hours in the program.

“We went to the county attorney and the judge, and they put her back on STS,” said Olson.

But some who illegally dump in the trailers are crafty enough to only do it at night, Olson said.

Knaeble urged county residents to find out how to properly dispose of items for recycling, which lessens the amount of garbage they pay to have hauled away.

“So many people in the area don’t realize we take glass and cardboard for free at the recycling center, just inside the door of the Transfer Station,” he said. “Instead of stuffing the trailers, go an extra mile and get rid of it with no hassle.”

Glass is no longer allowed in the trailers because of the risk of injury to STS crew and county staff. He said people have required stitches in the past because handling glass and the potential for a lawsuit against the county was too great to continue accepting glass in the trailers.

Sorting the garbage from the recyclables is a “messy job,” said Olson. “There’s sour food, milk — please rinse everything out.”

When the STS crew is not handling the county’s recycling program, it is picking up garbage and recyclables from ditches and other areas in the county.

Knaeble said he’s seen the amount of plastic recycled grow since he started his job in 1999.

“I see at least four times as much plastic as when I started,” he said. “And not as much glass.”

Despite the frustration of handling garbage among the recyclables, Knaeble said he feels the STS crew provides a value for the county taxpayer.

“I see it as doing something worthwhile for everybody — we handle recyclables and are getting people working,”

More information

Did you know?

Some facts about recycling from Dale Olson, director of Koochiching County Environmental Services Department:

- Recycling 1 ton of aluminum cans saves the equivalent energy of 1,655 gallons of gasoline. In other words, recycling four aluminum cans saves one can of gas. That’s enough energy to run your TV for 12 hours.
- More than 1/3 of new paper products made in the U.S. comes from recycled material. But we still throw away enough office and writing paper each year to build a 12-foot-high wall from Los Angeles to New York.
- In 2014, the county recycled 45,000 pounds of tin and aluminum cans.
- The county sold 73,000 pounds of No. 2 and No. 2 plastic. An estimate of four plastic containers per pound tells us that we recycled nearly 300,000 containers.
- The county recycled and sold about 410,000 pounds of paper products. This was mostly magazines, cardboard and newspaper but also included a few miscellaneous products.
- The county crushed 180,000 pounds of glass that will be used on site as gravel. The payback for glass doesn’t make it practical to haul it long distances so we quit doing that about 15 years ago. At that time they paid a penny a pound if we sorted it by color and delivered to Minneapolis. No thanks.

Other items recycled last year include:

- 359 large appliances
- 880 TVs
- 326 computer monitors
- 2,700 tires
- many car batteries
- 2,000 gallons of used oil

These numbers only include what came through the county’s transfer station. Many businesses have their own programs.

A quick guide to what’s acceptable. To learn more about the county’s recycling program, call at 283-1157.

- Glass: Must be delivered to the Transfer Station; labels do not have to be removed. Colored glass is acceptable.
- Paper: Some is recyclable. Put office paper and newspapers in paper bag and place in bin. Paper bags, newspaper, office paper may be placed in bins. Magazines, catalogs and corrugated cardboard must be brought to the Transfer Station.
- Metal: Aluminum and steel cans may be mixed together. Rinse the cans.
- Plastic: No. 1 and No. 2 colored or clear plastic is acceptable. Rinse containers and do not place in plastic bags in bins.

he said.

And Knaeble said he, too, is adding to the county’s recycling program.

“We go through at least a gallon of milk a day with four kids,” he said.

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