

September News

Compostable Plastic: Does It Fit with Recycling and Composting in the Portland Metro Area?

New containers that look like plastics but are labeled “biodegradable”, “compostable” or “polylactic acid (PLA)” are appearing in delis, grocery stores, and fast food restaurants. As well-meaning businesses work to green their practices, many are turning to these new, usually corn-based, products.



It may initially appear that disposable containers made from corn instead of traditional natural gas or oil should have environmental benefits. When considering the use of any new “green” material, consumers must ask whether the environmental benefits are real. We must also weigh potential gains against new problems the material may cause. It is important to ask if such a switch saves or uses more natural resources and energy and whether it reduces or increases carbon emissions to curb climate change.

There is little evidence that the use of bioplastics in place of petroleum-based plastics for take out or disposable containers is any more beneficial for the environment than any other disposable container.

Consider the following issues:

- **Landfill size:** There is little relevant data that bioplastics will break down in a landfill. It takes air and water to decompose materials, neither of which is present in today’s contained landfills. Paper has proven to break down very slowly in the same environment.
- **Landfill decomposition increases greenhouse gas emissions:** When biodegradable materials do break down in a landfill, they create methane, a more potent greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide. It is important to reduce materials that break down in a landfill—not increase them.
- **Consumer’s ability to compost bioplastic containers:** Home compost does not reach necessary temperatures to break down bioplastic. For bioplastics to decompose, they must be sent to a commercial compost facility, like businesses in the Portland Composts! program use. However, most take-out containers do not end up there because consumers take them off the premises.

- **Bioplastics in a compost facility:** Not all bioplastic products have been tested for commercial composting. Some bioplastics have been tested to successfully decompose in a compost facility; others have not successfully decomposed.
- **Bioplastics value to compost:** Biomass in compost comes from breaking down the cell walls of woody or food material. Polylactic acid is a simple sugar molecule that is digested quickly and provides little mass to the compost.
- **Ocean plastics pollution:** Oceans do not reach the temperatures necessary to break the bioplastics down. Bioplastics will collect in oceans in the same way that other plastics do now.
- **Recycling issues:** Bioplastics are not recyclable with regular plastics. Because they are difficult for consumers to distinguish from regular plastics, they can cause expensive problems for plastics recycling.
- **Energy and greenhouse gas comparison:** Recent life-cycle analysis studies evaluated the energy use and greenhouse gas emissions associated with production, transportation and disposal of bio- and petroleum-based products and found little difference between the two.
- **US dependence on petroleum:** Corn-based plastics will not remove the need for petroleum to make the container. Corn production requires soil management machinery, fertilizers and pesticides, all of which are petroleum intensive.
- **Land for packaging:** According to National Geographic, 6 billion people depend on 11 percent of the earth's land surface to produce food. Do we really want to use it for packaging?

With quickly decreasing resources and an immediate need to address climate change, we can no longer afford disposable containers whether they are made of paper, plastic or corn. Instead of seeking new materials for packaging, there is an urgent need to use all that creative energy to truly think outside of the paper/plastic/bioplastic box.

Be a good consumer!

- Watch for containers and bags labeled "compostable", "biodegradable" or PLA. They often have the #7 on them.
- Do not place bioplastic containers in plastics recycling programs. Mixing the two materials together causes problems for petroleum plastics recycling.
- Opt out of all disposable containers. Bring your own durable coffee mug and water bottle, bring your own container to restaurants for take away and leftovers.
- Purchase locally made foods or grow your own to avoid the need for packaging for transportation and storage.

Master Recyclers Tour of Denton Plastics

By **Heather Stanley** (Class 33)

(To read the full story with loads of great details about plastics recycling go to: <http://www.masterrecycler.org/PDF/MR%20Denton%20Plastics%20tour1.pdf>)

Never ones to pass up an opportunity to go behind the recycling scene, more than 22 Master Recyclers toured Denton Plastics Inc. in Northeast Portland on June 18. **Robin Rogers** (Class 38) organized the visit to the plastics resin supplier.

Company president and founder Dennis Denton opened his facility to the group in order to educate Master Recyclers about his business and to establish a relationship that he hopes will create new opportunities for efficiently collecting recyclable plastics. "Right now we could do a lot better job of going into the waste stream and pulling it out," Denton said.

Not long ago, Denton recalled, resin was going for 35 cents per pound and the ceiling was always 50 cents; today it's \$1. With reprocessed plastic costing half to two-thirds as much as virgin and oil prices escalating, Denton Plastics' recycled material is sold six months out, and the company operates 24/7.

"We want more plastic," Denton said.

A full-service company with 40 employees, Denton Plastics sells new material as well as recycled and has a separate pulverizer room to handle virgin LDPE. Depending on the desired finished product, plastics are extruded, compounded, shredded, granulated, pulverized or densified. Technicians will custom-blend polymers to customers' specifications. Committed to sustainability in its own practices, the company looks for other ways to save resources, offering used shipping boxes for \$5, versus \$22 new, and recycling the water used in its extruder.



Mr Denton shows plastic pellets ready for manufacturing.

What can Master Recyclers do?

Denton Plastics has the capacity to process and resell much more material — if it can be gathered efficiently. Denton has offered a tractor-trailer and assistance with training and packing, if Master Recyclers can come up with ways to collect more plastics in a relatively short period of time. Here are some ideas:

- Resurrect a working model, such as the Thriftway recycling program that collected plastics on the last Saturday of the month.
- Work with big companies that generate large amounts of waste.
- Conduct a fundraiser for a school or other organization. The group would collect the plastic, and Denton would purchase it at the fair market price.

If you have an idea for a plastic collection project, contact Dennis Denton at (503)257-9945 or dennisd@denplas.com. To learn more about Denton Plastics, visit www.denplas.com.

Master Recycler Fall Open House

Eco-psychology: The Science in Inspiration

Metro Council Chambers 600 NE Grand Blvd., Portland

Monday, November 3rd 7 – 9 p.m.

You are cordially invited to a provocative evening with speaker Dr. Thomas Joseph Doherty, Coordinator of Eco-psychology Studies at the Lewis & Clark Graduate School of Education and Counseling and an adjunct faculty at Pacific University's School of Professional Psychology. Dr. Doherty will talk about psychological reasons that people may resist lifestyle change. Some eco-psychologists embrace anti-consumerism. Doherty's system, which he calls "Sustainable Self," aims for a slow and mindful change. He will talk about how we can sift through all the information to make it personally relevant, and find sustainability on an everyday level for ourselves and the communities Master Recyclers reach out to.

Please RSVP. Contact: J Lauren Norris, (503)823-7530, masterrecycler@ci.portland.or.us

Clackamas County Wins Second Place Ribbon!

Congratulations to Clackamas County staff and Master Recyclers who staffed their prize-winning table at the Clackamas County Fair. The table included fun interactive parts, great information and gave away grocery tote bags to fair-goers. Despite soaring temperatures Master Recyclers had lots of great conversations about recycling and waste prevention. Thanks to **Jeanne and Jeff Becker, Ginny Haines, Angela Roccograndi, Renate Ryan-Jeppson, Todd Weedman** (all Class 37) and **Cindy Trumpower** (Class 24).

Certified Master Recyclers

Congratulations to the pair of Master Recyclers who completed their hours this month.

From the annual Lavender Farm Festival to Washington Park Concert Series, **Ginny Haines** (Class 37) really helped both Clackamas County and Portland get the word



Rebecca Sherman's recycling setup for ultimate frisbee games.

out at information tables on recycling, waste prevention and composting. Ginny also tabled at the County Fair and supported a Clackamas County business plastics roundup.

Rebecca Sherman (Class 32) proved to be the ultimate Master Recycler as she organized recycling at various regional ultimate frisbee events for the last couple years for her payback.

Washington County and Portland appreciates all of **Kelly Larson's** (Class 36) help tabling. Kelly has also made some exciting strides in waste reduction and education at the Hillsboro Parent Preschool including a board decision to commit to compost and durables and some great articles to parents.

Thank you to these fabulous Master Recyclers for your continued commitment to conserving our natural resources.

Master Recycler Fall Plastics Roundup Sign Up Now!

The **Fall Master Recyclers Plastics Roundup** will take place on two Saturdays and four locations, 9 a.m. – 2 p.m.

Shifts are 8 a.m. – 12 p.m. and 11 a.m. – 3 p.m.

Saturday October 4th – two locations:

- **Lake Oswego:** Co-hosted by Shorenstein Realty Services LP and Autodesk, Inc. 5400 Meadows Rd.
- **North Portland:** Hosted by Kaiser Permanente West Interstate 3325 N Interstate (off Fremont and Overlook Park)

Saturday, October 11th – two locations:

- **Milwaukie:** Hosted by City of Milwaukie 9600 SE Main (old Southgate Theatre site)
- **Hillsboro:** Hosted by Intel Ronler Acres 2501 NW 229th Ave

Sign up for as many locations and shifts as you'd like.

Contact: J Lauren Norris, (503)823-7530, masterrecycler@ci.portland.or.us

Volunteer Opportunities

Concordia Neighborhood Cleanup

5600 NE 42nd, Portland

Saturday, September 6th 7:30 – 10 a.m. and 10 a.m. – 1 p.m.

TJ Millbrooke (Class 8) invites Master Recyclers to help with e-waste, metal education, and recycling at this bulky waste neighborhood cleanup. For the last three years the Concordia clean-up has been by far the biggest in the Northeast Coalition of Neighborhoods. They take in over 11 full dumpsters of waste and recycling. They captured over 2,000 lbs of metal last year and donated the scrap value back to the neighborhood.

Contact: TJ Millbrooke, 503-460-3506, tj@yolocolorhouse.com



Christine Charneski talks to a Farmer's Market shopper.

Oregon City Farmers Market

Clackamas County Public Service Center

2051 Kaen Rd at Beaver Creek Rd, Oregon City

Saturday, Sept. 13th 9 a.m. – 2 p.m.

(work in shifts or all day)

Present the Clackamas Co. Recycling "Yes and No" kit with Clackamas Co. staff, who will be presenting their sustainability information.

Contact: Sherri Dow, Clackamas County, 503-353-4463, sherridow@co.clackamas.or.us

Iron Artist Waste Prevention and Recycling Table

100 SE Salmon, Portland

Saturday, September 13th 11 a.m. – 9 p.m.

and Sunday, September 14th 11 a.m. – 4 p.m.

Join Michael Salmond (Class 38) to table with the Metro wheel of fortune and Portland Recycles! This is a fantastic reuse event where competing teams make art sculptures from reused materials. It is the main annual fundraiser for SCRAP.



Contact: Michael Salmond msal989046@aol.com

Proper Festival

Kenton Park
2351 N Kilpatrick Street, Portland
Saturday, September 13th, noon – 4:30 p.m.

Join this festival that celebrates the spirit of the Kenton Community. This non-denominational concert is a great place to get out the word about waste reduction. Use the Wheel of Fortune game to talk to kids and adults about the importance of reduce, reuse, recycle and compost.

Contact: J Lauren Norris, (503)823-7530,
masterrecycler@ci.portland.or.us



Sabrina Litton (Class 38) and the new Metro waste reduction wheel at a community picnic.

Central Northeast Neighbors Electronic and Plastics Recycling Event

Madison High School 2735 NE 82nd Ave., Portland
Saturday, September 20th 9 a.m. – 3 p.m.

Help Master Recycler Rob Kappa (Class 37) run the plastics recycling at this community fundraiser for Central Northeast Neighbors. Bear eCycling will be there to collect electronic waste as well.

Contact: J Lauren Norris, (503)823-7530, masterrecycler@ci.portland.or.us

Hillsboro Fall Fest 2008

Downtown location TBD, Hillsboro
September 27th 8 a.m. – 4 p.m.

Calling all Master Recyclers that live or work in Hillsboro! CPO9 (Citizen Participation Organization) is looking to combine art, recycling and education (maybe with a bit of competition) into this year's Fall Fest. Think Junk-to-Funk meets recycled Art-on-a-Stick. Sign up for the planning of the "recycled art" portion of this event or to help staff a booth during the day of the event.

Contact: Heather Robinson, 503-846-3660, Heather_Robinson@co.washington.or.us

DON'T FORGET
Log your volunteer
hours!
In the "Members" area at
www.masterrecycler.org

Oregon Volunteers Recycling and Waste Prevention Presentation

Portland State University, 1825 SW Broadway, Portland

Tuesday, October 14th

1 hour section either 10:45 a.m., 1:45 p.m., or 3 p.m.

Help new AmeriCorps volunteers learn about recycling and waste prevention. Volunteers are from all over the country and may be new to local recycling. Some may be interested in setting up recycling or compost at the location where they will be placed.

Contact right away, as they are scheduling the training now.

Contact: Kate Budd, 503-725-5904, kate@oregonvolunteers.org

Conservation News



Recycling Advocates Annual Meeting

RESCHEDULED with new location (updated 8/29)

Solving the Plastic Bag Dilemma: Is Portland Behind?

Portland City Hall, Council Chambers, 1221 Southwest Fourth Ave, Portland

Monday, September 22nd 7 – 9 p.m.

The U.S. consumes over 100 billion plastic bags a year. Join Recycling Advocates and a distinguished panel of experts as the plastic bag dilemma is discussed. Should we be looking for a ban or tax on plastic bags in Portland? Should we be looking for a regional or statewide solution?

- Sam Adams, Portland City Commissioner
- Brian Rohter, New Seasons Market
- David Allaway, OR Department of Environmental Quality
- Tom Watson, King County Recycling and Environmental Services

In addition to the forum, Recycling Advocates members will be electing the 2008-2009 board of directors.

This forum is FREE and open to the public. Light refreshments will be served.

RSVP: info@RecyclingAdvocates.org

Build it Green! Tour of Homes

Saturday, September 20th

Tour sites open: 11 a.m. – 5 p.m.

Information Fair at ecohaus, 819 SE Taylor, Portland

3:30 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.

The seventh annual Build It Green! Tour of Homes will feature twenty green remodels and new homes, showcasing a variety of ways homeowners are conserving energy, preserving natural resources, purchasing locally and minimizing construction debris while creating beautiful, unique and healthy homes. The Tour and Information Fair is kid-friendly and seven tour sites are wheelchair accessible.

Visit www.portlandonline.com/osd/builditgreen for more information or to purchase tickets.

Junk to Funk Recycled Fashion Show Contest Call for Artists

This annual event features selected pieces of creative, wearable art designed with “trash” as both inspiration and textile. Put your artistic skills to use while exploring creative re-use in art and fashion. Support sustainability while competing to win prizes up to \$500! Enter to promote yourself, your business, or just for fun. Submissions are due October 15th. Artists will be notified by November 1st.

For more information and application, please visit www.junktofunk.org.

JOB OPPORTUNITIES

can be found in Job Seekers at the
Master Recycler Forum.
www.MasterRecycler.org

