

Carelessness undermines area recycling efforts

By Pat Murphy
staff writer

Careless or ineffective separating is causing problems and undermining recycling efforts.

In southeast Oakland County, a load of glass was rejected for recycling because containers were not separated as required, according to Thomas G. Walfen, general manager of the Southeastern Oakland County Resource Recovery Authority (SO-CRRA).

SO-CRRA has 11 member communities, including Birmingham, Troy and Lathrup Village.

In southwest Oakland, as much as 50 percent of the materials deposited at drop off centers were put in landfills — rather than recycled — because plastics and other materials were not sorted correctly, said Lenora K. Jadun, general manager of the Resource Recovery & Recycling Au-

thority of Southwest Oakland County.

RRASOC has eight member communities, including Farmington, Farmington Hills, Southfield and Novi.

The problem, according to Walfen and Jadun, is that people are not careful enough when separating the glass, tins, papers, plastics and other materials in the waste stream.

"I THINK IT'S a matter of education," said Walfen. "We have to spend more effort informing people about what must be done. But there are other problems as well."

Glass is a case in point. Walfen said, "Clear glass containers are put together," he said. "But some bottles — like light green wine bottles — might appear to be clear. But they're not."

Jadun agrees the major problem appears to be education. But she said

quick, decisive action is needed. "We're defeating the whole purpose of recycling," she said.

Using plastics as an example, Jadun notes that RRASOC can handle grades one and two — Polyethylene, Terephthalate and High Density Polyethylene, respectively. "We can recycle beverage bottles, milk jugs and detergent containers," she said. "But we can't handle (grades 3 to 7) cooking oil bottles, food wrappers, shampoo bottles or egg cartons."

Successful recycling depends on getting homogeneous materials (plastics, paper, glass or newspapers) processed for reuse, Jadun said.

"If the sorting isn't done carefully, there's contamination — egg cartons mixed with milk cartons — and the material can't be reused. Magazines can't be mixed with newspapers and window glass can't be mixed with food containers."

As much as 50 percent of the materials dropped off at recycling centers were contaminated in this fashion and subsequently deemed unusable, she said. "We had to put it into landfills."

Walfen and Jadun said the rules of sorting apply for all recycling, regardless of whether the trash is picked up at the curb or dropped off at centers.

But the problem of contamination — ineffective sorting — seems more prevalent at drop off centers. Neither Walfen nor Jadun speculated on the reason.

THE CITY MANAGER of Birmingham, however, said part of the problem may be people who live outside communities that have aggressive recycling programs and the educational program needed to make the effective.

"Our drop off centers are unmanned," said Thomas Markus. "We rely on the people. But we get all kinds of materials we're not equipped to handle... we've even had street signs from other cities."

While the scope and dimension of the problem have not been defined, Walfen and Jadun said contamination

may be intrinsic to widespread recycling.

"At first, very few people recycled their waste," said Jadun. "And they were careful about sorting. But now, as more people get into recycling, they may not be as well informed. They may not be as careful."

Careless sorting can be remedied, Jadun said. But the problem indicates the difficulty communities will likely encounter before reaching their announced goal of recycling 50 percent of the estimated 400 tons of municipal trash generated daily in Oakland County.

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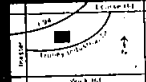
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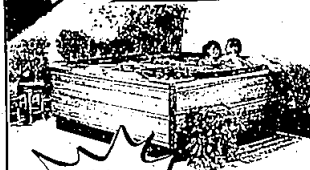
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