

## Energy and Recycling Committee (ERC) News

### WHY RECYCLE?

In March, the South Portland Energy and Recycling Committee set a goal to make South Portland a regional leader in recycling by increasing the city's recycling rate (currently 28%) to 35% by 2017 and to 40% by 2019. We're encouraging all South Portland residents to help reach this goal and make South Portland a leader in sustainability. In biweekly articles in the *Sentry* and in the South Portland Community Newsletter, available by subscription online at southportland.org, we'll provide information on how and what to recycle and updates on how our community is doing.

Why should we recycle our trash (rethink "trash" as "materials")? After all, Ecomaine converts 100% of the *non-recycled* trash it receives from our municipal waste collection into energy at its Portland power plant, leaving 10% of the converted volume as ash, which it stores at its environmentally safe ash mono fill (nearby in Scarborough and Westbrook). The *recyclables* are sorted, baled, and sent elsewhere for processing into products.

This all sounds pretty efficient, so why even bother recycling? Are there real tangible benefits, or is it just the latest politically correct fad? Why are we worried about recycling when there are bigger issues to address, like conservation of natural resources, energy independence, and climate change? In fact, all these issues are interrelated.

Here are three good reasons why increased recycling is beneficial for everyone.

**Recycling conserves natural resources and energy.** You can help reduce environmental degradation of natural resources, such as trees and minerals, and the energy required to process and transport them, by recycling paper products (newspaper and magazines, corrugated containers, office paper), metals and glass, certain plastic products, and electronics, and by purchasing recycled products. (For more complete lists of recyclables and products made from recyclables, watch for future *Sentry* articles.)

Two examples of these benefits: recycling aluminum cans saves 95% of the energy required to make the same amount of aluminum from mined bauxite, the virgin source of aluminum; recycling one glass bottle saves enough energy to light a 100-watt light bulb for four hours. Also, recycling is a gift that keeps on giving, whereas Ecomaine's conversion of trash to energy, while much better than dumping it all in a landfill, is a one-shot deal.

**Recycling reduces pollution and greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to global climate change.** Mining, deforestation, fuel extraction, and processing and transportation of raw materials increase greenhouse gases and pollution of air, water, and earth. Recycling paper products, for example, not only reduces greenhouse gas emissions and pollution resulting from harvesting, transporting, and processing trees; it also preserves forests so they can continue to remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. By recycling, we help ensure a resource-rich and clean environment for future generations.

**Recycling helps create new well-paid jobs in recycling and manufacturing industries.** The American recycling industry is larger than our auto industry and growing. According to the Institute for Local Self-Reliance, for every 10,000 tons of solid waste going to landfills, 1 job is created. That same amount of waste – kept out of landfills – can create 10 recycling jobs or 75 materials-reuse jobs and generate billions in federal, state, and local tax revenues.

By observing the three Rs for a cleaner environment – Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle – we can help save our natural resources; cut greenhouse gases, pollution, and energy use; create green jobs; and save money. What's not to like?

The South Portland Energy and Recycling Committee will make it easy for you to do your part by providing tips in future articles and newsletters about how to step up your recycling. We'll help unlock the mysteries of what can be recycled, how you can reuse your "trash," what and where you can donate used goods, and what products are made from recycled resources.

The Committee meets on the third Wednesday of each month at the South Portland Community Center. Meetings start at 6:30 pm and are open to the public. We look forward to your comments and participation.