

Energy and Recycling Committee (ERC) News

Our goal is to increase municipal recycling from our current rate of 29% to 35% by 2017 and 40% by 2019

Sustainability Efforts at Long Creek Youth Development Center

We all face a common challenge: what to do with our trash. People are talking about the three R's that benefit the planet – **Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle** – and these conversations are leading to actions in South Portland at the city level, in community groups and businesses, and in residents' homes.

One local community dealing with the problem of trash disposal is the Long Creek Youth Development Center in the Red Bank neighborhood of South Portland. Long Creek is residential facility for the rehabilitation and education of young offenders, male and female, ages 12 to 21. A staff of 195 professionals works with up to 163 residents, providing a variety of services to help them build skills and self-understanding and redirect their lives.

The American Correctional Association has recently published a document that reflects an active interest in promoting green buildings and culture in correctional facilities. The association visited Long Creek last year and will be recommending standards for sustainability.

Two teachers at Long Creek, Kate Ladlow and Valerie Densmore, have been instrumental in organizing a group of staff members and residents in an effort to raise awareness of the importance of green practices. A visitor sees posters along the corridors of the facility: "Please Break Down Boxes," "Reduce, Reuse, Recycle," lists of "Do Recycle" and "Don't Recycle" items. Residents have designed and printed recycling T-shirts and participate in daily recycling chores.

A group of Long Creek residents and staff will be visiting Ecomaine's South Portland facility to see how trash is recycled or converted into electricity. (This is a fascinating and worthwhile tour. School groups are especially welcomed. To arrange a visit, contact Leo Maheu at 207-773-1738.)

In the residential areas at Long Creek, the recycling program has focused only on cardboard and paper, but even that modest effort presents challenges. For security reasons, furniture and fixtures are attached to the floor, so access for residents to unattached recycling containers is limited.

Currently, there are designated dumpsters at Long Creek for general trash (including food waste), cardboard and paper, wood, metal, and mixed cans, but without a ramp at the loading dock, bins have to be lowered by hand and rolled some distance to the appropriate dumpsters. At this point, there are no procedures for weighing most of the recycled materials to calculate a recycling rate, and only metal collection going to New England Metal Recycling results in a small credit to the total Long Creek trash bill.

Once paper, cardboard, metal, and #1-7 plastic collected throughout the facility are measured and recycled, or single stream recycling is introduced, the next challenge will be to introduce composting in the cafeteria. Currently, all leftover food, cups, napkins, and milk containers are

discarded as trash. All of these items can be composted (as they can be in our homes). To reduce serving time and maintain fairness at Long Creek, content and size are uniform for each serving, so there is a great deal of waste. Collecting this waste for pickup by one of the local composting services would provide compost for the Long Creek garden tended by residents and staff and would substantially reduce the amount of general trash, but achieving this goal will require cost-benefit analysis and a great deal of time, effort, and cooperation. The benefits to the environment are indisputable.

The greatest challenge at Long Creek, as it is in our homes and communities, is to get everyone to make recycling a habit. South Portland is aiming for a 35% recycling rate citywide by 2017, and 40% by 2019. With leadership and commitment throughout the facility, Long Creek could reach that goal even sooner.

The South Portland Energy and Recycling Committee meets the third Wednesday of each month at the South Portland Community Center. Meetings start at 6:30 p.m. and are open to the public.