I recently attended the “Re-Think Waste” Massachusetts recycling meeting, and was absolutely blown away by a session on textile recycling. I’m sharing with you what I learned, and hope you too will consider making textile recycling as important as we all make paper, aluminum, plastic and glass recycling.

Fleece, flannel, corduroy, cotton, nylon, denim, wool and linen. What can you do with these fibers when you’re finished wearing them, sleeping on them or draping them over your windows? One way to benefit both your community and the environment is to donate used textiles to charitable organizations. Most recovered household textiles end up at these organizations which sell or donate the majority of these products. The remainder go to either a textile recovery facility or the landfill.

Textile recycling seems to be forgotten among its more strongly recycled cousins—paper, aluminum, plastic, glass, etc. Yet textiles are at least 95% recyclable. Currently, only about 15% of textiles are being recycled, so we have a lot of work to do in informing the public and businesses (including hotels) about recycling textiles. First of all, textiles are any fabric—so that means clothing, accessories, outer wear, underwear, rugs, draperies, bed and bath linens, table linens, placemats, rugs, purses, belts, hats, gloves, boots, shoes, scarves, etc. The tiny percentage of textile materials that are disposed of as trash by repurposers are either wet, mildewed or contaminated with oil, paint or another hazardous material.

The only items that are unacceptable are those that are wet or heavily stained or soiled. Once the item is dry, it may be recycled. This definition means that less than 1% of textile items should be going to the landfill. So, one message here is that if you drop clothing in a curbside collection box, it would be best if it’s donated in a repurposed dry cleaning or plastic bag, so it won’t get wet inside the collection box.

Again, ANY textile that is not wet, heavily stained or mildewed is acceptable for recycling or repurposing. It doesn’t matter if a zipper is broken, if it is missing buttons, if it is torn or if it has staining or paint. Repairs and enhancing modifications may be made by vendors in other countries.

“Lightly Worn”: We all know that term, but we all need to forget it because all textiles can be repurposed. Clothing that is suitable for resale in the US will be offered for sale by a charity or resale shop. Clothing not suitable for resale will be sold by the pound to a repurposing company—so your charity will still benefit.

The textile repurposing company will sort items into about 300 categories. The second most important and most valuable of these categories will be clothing to be offered for sale in other countries. So, these are then separated according to categories beginning with gender, age (baby, teen, adult, etc.), type of clothing (men’s shirts, women’s blouses, etc.), type of fabric (wool, cotton, etc.) and season. Each group of these items will be baled very tightly (which makes shipping more efficient) and sold by the ton to vendors around the world. These vendors often have special requests for the textile items they want to offer their customers, and so place specific orders. Some of the most coveted clothing sought are bras and underwear! Who knew? They also desperately want belts, purses, shoes, hats, etc.—and all clothing accessories.

The donation of clothing, shoes, linens and bedding supports a thriving industry across the country. Charities such as Goodwill, Salvation Army, church charities, etc. report that about 15-20% of the clothing and textiles they receive as donations are sold in their retail stores. In some areas, Goodwill has secondary stores where they mark down clothing that hasn’t sold in the other stores. About 45% ends up being sent to developing countries as wearable clothing, another 30% is sent to wiping cloth companies where they are converted into industrial wiping cloths and the remainder is sent to fiber converters where they are broken down into their basic fiber components to be re-manufactured into insulation, carpet padding or sound-proofing materials. The industry is actively seeking other uses for these textile materials.

“Recycling textiles allows charitable organizations to meet their triple bottom line goals: operate successful social enterprises, provide much needed services to communities in which they operate and support environmental efforts,” says a Goodwill Industries representative.

Since the mid-1940’s, US charities and the post-consumer textile recycling industry have repurposed and recycled billions of pounds of clothing, household textiles, shoes and accessories. This ensures your old clothing, footwear and textiles continue to add value to the US economy and beyond. They also help keep people employed here and all over the world. There are some very interesting videos about recycling clothing around the world at smartasn.org/about/videos.cfm.

Post-Consumer Textile Recycling is one of the oldest, most efficient recycling industries in existence. Clothing recyclers add tremendous value through the labor-intensive sorting, separating and recycling of secondhand clothing into 3 main categories: fibers, reclaimed wipers and used clothing.

The Secondary Materials and Recycled Textiles (SMART) Association is working to increase the amount of textile waste that can be recovered while developing new uses, products and markets for products derived from pre-consumer and post-consumer textile waste. Key in your zip code at smartasn.
org to learn where you can recycle textiles. Also, you can use earth911.com to determine where in your zip code you can recycle anything.

Textile recovery facilities separate overly worn or stained clothing into a variety of categories. Based on data from the Council for Textile Recycling, it was estimated that 1.3 million tons of clothing textiles were recovered for recycling in 2009. Some recovered textiles become wiping and polishing cloths. Cotton can be made into rags or form a component for new high-quality paper. Knitted or woven woolens and similar materials are “pulled” into a fibrous state for reuse by the textile industry in low-grade applications, such as car insulation or seat stuffing. Other types of fabric can be reprocessed into fibers for upholstery, insulation and even building materials. Buttons and zippers are stripped off for reuse. Very little is left over at the end of the recycling process. The remaining natural materials, such as various grades of cotton, can be composted.

For the first time ever, clothing brands, retailers, consumers, municipalities, charitable organizations, academics and recyclers are joining forces to promote the recycling of clothing and textiles. The Council for Textile Recycling (CTR) recently released its new website aimed at educating the public on the importance of recycling all clothing and textiles, not just those that are “gently worn.”

“Our goal is to have zero post-consumer textile waste going into landfills by 2037,” says Eric Stubin, CTR Chairman of the Board. “In the US the average person discards 70 lbs. of their old clothing, shoes and household textiles in their local landfill each year. We’re educating people that clothing and textiles are among the most recyclable items in their lives.”

In the US, the EPA estimates more than 25 billion pounds of clothing and textiles including clothing, linens, belts and shoes are generated annually. The agency also reports more than 21 billion pounds of post-consumer textile waste ends up in landfills every year.

Many organizations promote sustainable clothing manufacturing and green initiatives in the apparel industry, and it’s exciting to finally have an organization representing all of the stakeholders as we strive to bring wide scale awareness to a very solvable problem. If consumers, municipalities and the apparel industry implement, promote, and market “Wear. Donate. Recycle,” we will significantly divert more post-consumer textile waste in the years to come. The Council’s website, weardonaterecycle.org, will be compiling a resource library for consumers, municipalities, apparel and footwear brands and retailers interested in developing clothing and footwear recycling programs.

Facts:
- An estimated 13.1 million tons of textiles were generated in 2010, or 5.3% of total municipal solid waste (MSW) generation.
- An estimated 14.0% of textiles in clothing and footwear and 17.1% of items such as sheets and pillowcases was recovered for export or reprocessing in 2010.
- The recovery rate for all textiles was 15.0% in 2010, 2.0 million tons.
- The US EPA estimates that textile waste occupies nearly 5% of all landfill space.
- While the EPA estimates that the textile recycling industry recycles approximately 3.8 billion pounds of post-consumer textile waste (PCTW) each year, this only accounts for approximately 15% of all PCTW, leaving 85% in our landfills.
- The average US citizen discards 70 pounds of clothing and other textiles annually.

Q&A

Q: If clothing has a stain, a rip, a missing button or broken zipper, I can’t donate it, can I?
A: Yes, absolutely, you can donate any fabric or textile piece, including shoes, belts, hats, stuffed toys and accessories of any kind. Absolutely everything wearable will all be repurposed or recycled. The only fabric or textile that should go into the landfill are those that are wet, moldy or exceptionally dirty items.

Q: How do I decide whether or not I can donate clothing?
A: Don’t try to decide. Just donate it if it’s dry, not moldy, mildewy or exceptionally dirty. It’s best if the item is dry and clean. It doesn’t matter if it’s stained or has paint spots.

Q: I can’t decide if I should leave my clothing in a box for the Red Cross or another group?
A: First of all, don’t try to decide where your item is going. Don’t think, “Oh, someone in Haiti would really like this item, so I’ll give it to the Red Cross and they’ll send it to some devastated area.” It would not be unusual for a for-profit company to pay the Red Cross or any other charitable entity to use their logo and brand. The company that owns the box will recycle the materials and will probably pay the Red Cross a fee or percentage.

Q: How do I decide to which group to give my clothing and textiles?
A: Remember that what the charity wants is the money earned from selling the items. Of course, they also want to help the community they’re assisting. So just choose the charity you want to help most—just as you would decide which group deserves your money. You can look at charitywatch.com or charitynavigator.com for evaluations of charities.

Q: Where will my good used clothing end up?
A: All wearable clothing will first be offered for resale in a second-hand store, perhaps a Goodwill store. If it’s not sold there, Goodwill, for instance, has outlet stores, where the price is reduced considerably. If it’s not sold there, it’ll probably be sold to a textile recycling entity where it will be graded and sorted into one of 75 categories according to the type of fabric, quality and seasonality, and then sold by the ton.

Also, US apparel and accessories are very desired all over the world. They desperately want our used clothing, and textile dealers all over the world order items by the ton from US textile recyclers. Items they especially want are underwear (yes, underwear—especially bras), belts, hats, bathing suits, shoes of any kind (even singles). There’s even a brarecycling.com company! (Bras are extremely important to young girls around the world.) Drapes, curtains, rugs, shower curtains, towels and bed linens are also recyclable textile products.

From there, for instance, blue jean fabric items are chopped up and all hardware is removed, then ground up to take the materials back to its fiber form and possibly made into insulation for homes. Textiles not useful otherwise may be made into wiping or polishing cloths for commercial and industrial applications. Some are chopped and/or ground up and are made into carpet padding. The main thing to remember is that there’s little reason for any textile to end up in the landfill because there are so many ways it can be repurposed.

Q: What about the fact that we’re always told to donate
“gently worn” clothing?
A: Ignore it. “Gently worn” clothing will probably be offered for sale as second-hand clothing, but so will many other items that are “well worn.” All other textile items will be recycled in one form or another. So, donate any dry, hopefully clean clothing or accessories or anything made of textiles. It will be recycled and repurposed. Recycling textiles will help and be useful to people all over the world. Recycling textiles will maintain and create jobs. Recycling textiles will keep thousands of tons of textiles out of our landfills.

Q: What should hotels do with retired bed and bath linens? What about clothing items in their “lost and found?”
A: Though locale may be the difference because of the cost of shipping, hotels can sell retired linens directly to textile reproprocessors, i.e., wiping cloth companies (see smartasn.org) or they can donate linens and clothing to one or more local charities which accept textiles.

Footnote: Two college students decided that the US was abusing Africa by sending all our old t-shirts there, and set off on a mission to repatriate 500 t-shirts. You can see what they learned in an interesting video related to textile recycling at projectrepat.org/pages/movies. Watch the second video, “I didn’t dance my ass off at Josh’s Bar Mitzvah.” It’s a meaningful 17+ minutes. You’ll love the story, and you’ll love the results.

HELLO ANDERSON CHEMICAL COMPANY!

The INTEGRA Program®, a division of ALLY MEMBER
Anderson Chemical Company, currently offers 17 US EPA’s Design for the Environment (DfE) recognized products spanning all three of our product lines—kitchen, laundry and housekeeping.

From our TIP® (Total Impact Program) for laundries, which was the first institutional laundry program recognized by the DfE in 1997, to our HPG (High Performance Green) Foodservice products, or our DOSE™ housekeeping products, INTEGRA® offers high performance products that are safer for customers and the environment.

With a growing national focus on environmentally preferable products and sustainable operations, Anderson Chemical Company provides 101 years of experience in the chemical manufacturing business that can assist you in meeting your green and sustainability goals.

To get more information on how The INTEGRA Program® and our products and Network Partners can help meet your cleaning challenges, visit our website at theintegraprogram.com/products, e-mail us at integra@accomn.com or call 800/366-2477.

FOR COD AND COUNTRY

Even though there are hundreds of types of fish for sale, most chefs know only a few varieties. That’s where Barton Seaver comes in with the unique approach of his cookbook: By combining all manner of fish (not just the familiar standbys) with loads of fresh vegetables, he fosters sustainability both in the sea and on the farm. Organized by season, For Cod and Country features only fish caught in those months (plus “a fifth season” for farmed fish), along with ideas for preparation, seasonings and lists of alternate fish to substitute in inventive new dishes.

Barton has now taken on another task. Along with chefscol-laborative.com, he’s encouraging tracing seafood from the fishing vessel to the dinner plate, in order to have more confidence in the food we serve. We need to tackle the dangerous and costly issue of seafood fraud. We’re asking everyone to go to http://act.oceana.org/letter/l-seafood-senate/?source=homepage to read and sign a letter that will be sent to our elected officials in Washington, DC. The letter explains the current issue and the hope for the government’s help to end seafood fraud.

Happy Housekeeping: 7 tips for improving room attendants’ productivity

As the front line, room attendants play an integral role in creating a pleasant experience for guests through cleaner rooms. They also represent a sizeable opportunity to increase productivity and improve bottom line results for hotels. Cintas Corp. offers tips for helping out room attendants.

1. Offer job-specific training. Understanding proper methods for performing job functions helps reduce the time spent in the room, improve cleanliness and hygiene and prevent repetitive motion.
2. Provide room attendants with the right tools. Properly equipping housekeepers can enhance productivity by up to 54%, according to the ISSA 540 Cleaning Times.
3. Equip room attendants with stocked and locked carts. This reduces unnecessary trips to storage areas to replace missing supplies.
4. Make janitorial closets easily accessible. Placing frequently used items, such as chemical stations, in easily accessible locations helps reduce time spent on restocking.
5. Conduct procedural audits. Results-based audits are not enough. Procedural audits yield consistency of results.
6. Offer room attendants an “engineering checklist.” Provide a checklist of potential issues to be fixed by their Engineering Department.
7. Leave deep cleaning to the experts. Room attendants are not trained or equipped, and do not have the time to perform a thorough deep cleaning.


Bike-friendly Hotels in North America

Victoria, BC, Canada is leading North Americans to bike-friendly accommodations and is putting together a hotel ranking system at cyclevancouverisland.ca. Their website has helpful tips for biking guests, which will also inform hoteliers regarding what other properties are offering bicyclists. Here’s a list of hotel features bikers are looking for.

1. allows bikes in the rooms or has secure, covered bicycle parking,
2. offers complimentary bikes on-site or discounted rentals nearby,
3. is on or near the city’s cycling path network and keeps cycle route maps on hand,

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1. allows bikes in the rooms or has secure, covered bicycle parking,
2. offers complimentary bikes on-site or discounted rentals nearby,
3. is on or near the city’s cycling path network and keeps cycle route maps on hand,
4. is near bike shops,
5. has an equipment check-in or lockers where cyclists can secure belongings after they check out.

Hardcore cyclists will want to know if the hotel offers a place to hang up wet cycling clothing, or has laundry facilities, and if it has an on-site DIY bike wash center with basic tools to tune or pump up. Following are a few notable biking properties (although GHA found nothing on their websites about their bicycle programs):

Hotel San Jose (1316 South Congress Avenue, Austin, TX). Rents out Townie Cruisers and a Public Bike, locks and helmets. Bike racks outside, and some weather-protected storage, some tune-up tools and bike wash can be arranged. Located on one of Austin’s “killer bike lane system” roads.

EPIC Hotel (270 Biscayne Blvd. Way, Miami, FL). Lends bicycles, including tandem bikes and bicycles for women, men and children, along with locks and helmets.

Bowery Hotel NYC (335 Bowery, NY, NY). Offers 8-10 complimentary bikes to their guests.

Rushmeyer’s (161 Second House Rd., Montauk, NY). Offers cycling as one of many activities available to guests.

Accent Inns (3233 Maple St., Victoria, BC, Canada). This hotel chain allows bikes in ground floor rooms, has laundry facilities and has a wash and tuning station.

Bowery Hotel NYC (335 Bowery, NY, NY). Offers 8-10 complimentary bikes to their guests.

**Sustainable Streets**

Sustainable Streets (sustainablestreets.org) offers free safety courses to help ease your transition into biking. Courses are available in Burbank, West Hollywood and along the beach in Santa Monica. Classes start with four hours in the classroom, followed by one hour on a simulated road and then almost five hours of actual street riding. Simulated road, designed by city engineers and painted by city painting crews, give apprehensive riders an opportunity to practice real-world riding without fear.

Sustainable Streets' goal is to build knowledge and confidence in biking to reduce miles spent behind the wheel. Why is it important? Bicycling has the potential to reduce traffic congestion, lower noise levels and reduce airborne pollutants. Replacing driving to work or quick trips to the grocery store with bicycling is a fun way to live a healthy and environmentally-sustainable lifestyle.

Ron Durgan, President of Sustainable Streets, has created a program which will change the assumption that living in Los Angeles requires a car. Don’t think it is possible? Ron hasn’t owned a car in 16 years. He instead uses a combination of zip cars, public transit and his bicycle to transverse Los Angeles. During the workweek his commute starts in Beverly Hills and ends in Santa Monica. He makes the trip with his bike and a little help from the subway.


**Maintain The Look Of Floors Through Mopping**

*Developing a proper wet and dry mopping schedule will keep floors looking like new*

When it comes to floor care, “the biggest misconceptions that end users have is that a certain floor finish or piece of equipment will provide them with beautiful floors,” says Vince Sortino, vice president of sales at Philip Rosenau Co., Warming, PA. “While a properly selected floor finish with characteristics that match your maintenance program are essential, and proper equipment can help save on labor, the real key to beautiful floors is daily maintenance.”

In an effort to continually provide a desired look within the facility, custodial operations managers must develop a schedule for proper floor maintenance.

“Sweeping and dry mopping regularly can unify the look of the floors over time and extend the life of finishes,” says William Suter, LEED-AP and director of facilities management at American University in Washington, DC. “In a busy area, daily care might be the right frequency and implementing the use of a microfiber system may result in reduced labor, enabling cleaners to accomplish more per unit of time.”

Distributors agree that daily dry mopping or vacuuming is essential in proper hard floor care maintenance. Leaving dirt and debris will abrade the floor finish over time and may result in more frequent stripping and refinishing.

“Loose dirt does more harm to floors than anything else,” says Larry Johnson, product manager for S. Freedman & Sons Inc., Landover MD. “I recommend dust mopping or vacuuming at least every day, sometimes more depending on the traffic in the area.”

Dust mopping is not strenuous work, and it doesn’t have to be time consuming for departments. Tools and equipment are available to expedite the process. Consensus among distributors is that using either microfiber mops or vacuums with hard floor tools will provide the best results.

That said, whatever tool departments choose to use for dusting, it is essential that it be clean. Following manufacturer recommendations for cleaning vacuum filters and emptying bags/canisters will keep dirt and debris in check. Also, a clean cotton or microfiber mop is just as important as the mopping itself.

If using a static-charged dust mop, such as microfiber, departments are warned to steer clear of dust treatment chemicals. This will damage the fabric and can create slippery floors.

Once dry mopping is complete, departments are advised to wet mop or clean floors using an autoscrubber. This should be done at least once a day, again, depending on the traffic of the area or even the time of year.

“During winter months, for instance, you may be concerned with moisture from rain or snow affecting floor cleanliness,”

First Plastic Bridge in Public Highway in the US

Axion International Holdings, Inc., a leading producer of industrial building products and railroad ties made from 100% recycled plastic and plastic composites, announced that through its sales representative, Innovative Green Solutions, LLC (IGS), it has received a purchase order from the town of York, Maine for Axion’s innovative Recycled Structural Composite (RSC) material, which will be used in the construction of a plastic bridge. This bridge will be the first of its kind used in public highway applications in the US, and the first recycled plastic vehicular bridge in the state of Maine.

The bridge will be approximately 26’ wide x 15’ long and will be used to replace an existing concrete box culvert. The bridge will consist of a single-span, with curbing, abutment headwalls and wingwalls. Upon final installation, the bridge deck will be covered in gravel and surfaced with asphalt pavement. The larger structure will provide a more effective passage for water, fish and aquatic organisms. For additional information, see axionintl.com/media.html.

WELCOME BIG 3 PACKAGING LLC!

Most traditional cleaning products are 95% or more water. At ALLY MEMBER Big 3 Packaging, we manufacture high quality, high performance liquid cleaning concentrate solutions in 100% water soluble film—PAK-IT®, and many are EPA and DfE certified.

With the PAK-IT® system, there is no need to cut, tear or pour. Simply drop the pouch into a container, bucket, bottle or scrubber—add water—and it’s ready to work. It dissolves in an instant, leaving you with the precise mixture of cleaning solution for the task at hand without spills, mess or waste. No more heavy carts. These compact refills are more affordable to ship, require less storage space and are easy to carry and use. Instead of making unnecessary trips back to the maintenance room, employees can simply carry several refills wherever they go. They just add water and wait a minute.

Additionally, our sturdy, reusable bottles drastically reduce waste. No matter what your cleaning needs are, just add water on site. Our product line is safe for people, respectful of our natural resources and saves money and time too. If your organization is still using conventional cleaning methods, we invite you to visit big3packaging.com or call us at 800/426-1127.

PARTING WITH OLD ELECTRONICS

It can be tough to part with old electronics that once cost big bucks, but a host of new trade-in services will help you guiltlessly de-clutter. Online services allow customers to sell used smartphones, laptops, cameras and even GPS systems, for cash. The services typically buy items still in demand. We tested three online services and a walk-in service offered at most Best Buy stores. They were simple and quick to use. The online services let consumers search for the product they’d like to sell on the websites and get a trade-in estimate, which may vary from week to week. At times, figuring out the models and condition of our devices was confusing. Customers not happy with the initial quote can ask for a re-evaluation from the online services. If the product is in good condition, users typically can print out a prepaid label to ship items free of charge to be inspected by trained technicians. They’ll get e-mail updates about the status of their items. Payment arrives via check or PayPal.

It took a few minutes to get a quote for each item. We searched for the model on the site, answered several questions about the condition and instantly received a dollar-amount offer for each item. Two of the four items we wanted to sell were declined. For the two accepted shipments, we received payment less than three weeks after shipping. We found the services dependable and a great way to start spring cleaning.

Customers at Gazelle.com, a trade-in website get $100 for trade-ins for smartphones on average. A used but well-maintained iPhone 4S can sell for as much as $371, which can be even more than a customer who signed on for a two-year mobile plan paid in the first place.

Online service Nextworth.com also allows in-person trade-ins at some Target stores for a Target gift certificate. We used the site to send in a four-year-old Panasonic Lumix camera that was valued at $1.62. We included four old videogames, which brought the trade-in total to $5.78.

Taking our old BlackBerry Torch to Best Buy’s Trade-In Program was complicated. We visited three New York stores and got various answers from the customer-service representatives who processed the trade-in of our BlackBerry. Customers with successful trades get a Best Buy gift certificate for their trade on the spot. We would try the service again, just so we could bypass the mail-in process. Of the services we tried, Best Buy accepts the widest array of items, including bulky items like game consoles.

YouRenew.com had the quickest turnaround. Our smartphone BlackBerry Bold was valued at $21, and we sent it in with the provided prepaid shipping label.

How to Increase the Value of Your Electronics

• Use a case and screen protector for mobile devices or tablets.
• Keep the original box and accessories including battery, cords and chargers.
• Sell electronics as early as possible to help retain value; some services offer a 30-day guarantee of lock-in price.
• Clean phone and screen monthly to prevent grime buildup.

May / June 2012

“Green” Hotels Association® Geening Newsletter
LED STREETLIGHT’S PRICE CUT IN HALF

Lighting manufacturer Cree Inc. (cree.com) says it has halved the cost of its light-emitting-diode street lights and hopes the new lower prices will sway local governments, resorts, event and parking lot businesses to adopt the new technology. The new Cree outdoor street-light unit will sell for under $200 when bought in volume, according to Ty Mitchell, a lighting executive at the North Carolina-based company. At that price, the new bulbs will be comparable in cost to traditional high-pressure sodium vacuum technology when maintenance and energy costs are included. That would clear what has been seen as a key obstacle to greater adoption. The caveat is whether Cree’s new lights are able to emit an equal amount of light at a good enough quality for a long enough period of time.

LED lights emit light when a semi-conductor is zapped with electricity. Cree was able to produce a more efficient LED chip, so its new lights can use fewer chips in each unit, lowering the cost.

LED lights not only require less electricity than traditional bulbs, but their longer life means they need less maintenance. While a replacement bulb for a traditional high-pressure sodium light costs around $10, it requires two maintenance workers and a bucket truck to put it in, which costs nearly $200.

The cost of LED lights has been halved over the past three years. Yet they are still more than twice as expensive as the high-pressure sodium bulbs that light the streets of most US cities, while using about a half as much energy.

Cree’s new streetlights use half the number of LEDs as in older models, and they are able to produce twice the amount of light as measured in lumens for the same price. Cree attributes the changes to improvement in its silicon carbide technology.


Grappling With a Garbage Glut

We toss out 7 pounds of trash a day each, spending billions to manage it.

Each week, we push our trash to the curb, and it seemingly disappears. But where does it all go—the spent cartons of milk, the computer keyboard fried by spilled coffee, those empty dog food cans?

A team of researchers at MIT decided to find out. In 2009, they began attaching transmitter chips to thousands of pieces of ordinary garbage. They tossed this “smart trash” into the bin, sat back and watched the tortuous, disturbing path that our garbage often takes: the meanderings of electronic waste as it headed for distant shores, of ratty old sneakers that ran the equivalent of a dozen marathons, of printer cartridges that traversed the continent not once but twice on the road to recycling. This clever experiment threw a spotlight on the biggest, costliest, dirtiest secret about our garbage—our ignorance of how much we produce, what it contains and what happens to it once it leaves our hands.

Take the nation’s official trash tally—used alike by environmentalists, businesses and policy makers—which maintains that the average American tosses out 4.4 pounds of trash a day, with about a third getting recycled and the rest going to landfills. These numbers are found in the EPA’s exhaustive annual compendium “Municipal Solid Waste in the United States.”

But the EPA’s “materials flow analysis” dates back to the bad old days when there were 10 times the number of town dumps and many more illegal ones, with little actual weighing and regulation. Today the business model of the landfill and recycling business depends on precise measurement (and billing per ton), so we have much more real-world data. Using these sources, the most recent survey conducted by Columbia University and the trade journal BioCycle found that Americans actually throw out much more than the EPA estimates, a whopping 7.1 pounds a day, and that less than a quarter of it gets recycled.

Our Annual Waste

- 19 billion pounds of polystyrene peanuts
- 40 billion plastic knives, forks and spoons
- 28 billion pounds of food
- Enough steel to level and restore Manhattan
- Enough plastic film to shrink-wrap Texas

So how does America’s trash weigh in? Here are some key numbers from the emerging science of garbology:

- At 7.1 pounds of trash a day, each of us is on track to produce a staggering 102 tons of waste in an average lifetime.
- Trash has become America’s leading export: mountains of waste paper, soiled cardboard, crushed beer cans and junked electronics. China’s No. 1 export to the US is computers, according to the Journal of Commerce. The United States’ No. 1 export to China, by number of cargo containers, is scrap.
- American communities on average spend more money on waste management than on fire protection, parks and recreation, libraries or schoolbooks, according to US Census data on municipal budgets.

As these snapshots suggest, garbage costs are staggering. New York City alone spent $2.2 billion on sanitation in 2011. According to the city’s Department of Sanitation, more than $300 million of that was just for transporting its citizens’ trash by train and truck—12,000 tons a day—to out-of-state landfills, some as far as 300 miles away. How much is 12,000 tons a day? That’s like throwing away 62 Boeing 747 jumbo jets daily, or driving 8,730 new Honda Civics into a landfill each morning.

On the opposite coast, Los Angeles has opted to construct a garbage mountain 500 feet high, taller than most of the city’s high-rises. This is Puente Hills Landfill—trash as geologic feature, so full of 60 years’ worth of decomposing garbage that the methane it produces is pumped into generators that provide enough power for 70,000 homes. At the landfill’s flat and dusty summit, a dozen bulldozers and graders swarm every day, backing and turning and mashing and shaping. “More people should see what I see here,” says Michael Speiser, whose job is to sculpt trash into a mountain with the blade of a bulldozer. “Everything that’s advertised on TV ends up [here] sooner or later, and a lot sooner than most people think.”

Puente Hills is just the largest of the 1,900 municipal landfills operating nationwide. The chief executive of Waste Management, the world’s largest trash company, estimates that
there is at least $20 billion in valuable resources locked inside the materials buried in US landfills each year, if only we had the technology to recover it cost effectively.

The US doesn’t have to handle trash this way. Other countries with big economies and high standards of living have rejected the disposable products that make up so much of America’s garbage—in part because European countries hold manufacturers, not taxpayers, responsible for the costs of packaging waste. With that sort of incentive, toothpaste tubes need not come in redundant cardboard boxes and televisions sets can leave the store with no boxes at all. The average Dane makes four pounds of trash a day, according to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development; the average Japanese generates 2.5 pounds.

Other countries also are shunning landfills. Austria, the Netherlands, Sweden, Belgium and Denmark all send less than 4% of their garbage to landfills; Germany does no landfiling at all. Recycling rates there are two to three times America’s, and the rest of their trash goes to waste-to-energy plants.

The preferred mode in Europe is to build not a few hugely expensive incineration behemoths but a larger number of smaller, community-based utilities that burn trash to provide electricity and heat through underground conduits. The technology in the newest plants limits toxic emissions of dioxins, a major issue with incinerators of the past, to levels similar to a backyard barbecue grill’s. Methane and carbon emissions combined are less than those emanating from landfills. One facility being built in Denmark will be hidden beneath a community ski park.

Both LA and New York City are considering major waste-to-energy projects, and Waste Management is experimenting with new technologies, including a test facility in Arlington, OR, that uses a process known as plasma gasification. The technology vaporizes (but doesn’t burn) garbage with arcs of electrical energy that heat matter inside their beam to 25,000 degrees. The process takes place in the absence of oxygen, so many of the normal, noxious byproducts of combustion aren’t produced. Instead, out comes a synthetic gaseous fuel and a lump of shiny rock, not unlike volcanic glass, with toxins locked up inside in relative safety. This garbage death ray reduces trash volume by 99%, not even leaving ash behind—just 20 pounds of obsidian for every ton of trash disintegrated. The process is still too expensive to be commercial, but it shows promise.

Of course, the best way to reduce trash is to waste less in the first place. Cut out disposable plastic bags or bottled water. Buy used or refurbished electronics. Consider whether that thing you’re buying will be treasured for years to come or discarded in a few months. The real sacrifice, even when it is invisible to most of us, is accumulating ever more things that quickly find their way to our costly, growing mountains of garbage.

BuildingGreen’s Top-10 Green Building Products for 2012

BuildingGreen, Inc., publisher of GreenSpec and Environmental Building News, announced the Top-10 Green Building Products for 2012. This tenth annual award recognizes the building products representing important green building innovation.

“There are more ‘green’ building products than ever, but not all of them address a real need—or worse, some of them may create new problems down the road,” says BuildingGreen founder and GreenSpec executive editor Alex Wilson. “In selecting this year’s Top-10 products, we looked for companies that solved pressing needs in energy efficiency, reduced toxicity in building materials, enhanced retrofit applications and offered unique solutions in other areas.”

This year’s selections are diverse, including a packaged gray-water system facilitating landscaping water efficiency, a pioneering solar thermal system using water as its heat-transfer medium instead of glycol for increased efficiency, an air-to-air heat pump system with integrated tenant submetering—key for multifamily applications—and a durable, PVC-free resilient flooring. “Products with multiple environmental attributes, such as durability combined with low toxicity, remain a key frame of reference for our Top-10 selections,” said Wilson.

BuildingGreen’s Top-10 product selections, as in previous years, are drawn primarily from new additions to GreenSpec, the company’s database of best-in-class green building products, with more than 2,200 featured listings and product lines. “It’s exciting to see the new products being introduced to the market each month,” said Wilson. New products are reviewed in-depth in Environmental Building News and in GreenSpec’s e-mail newsletter.

A big driver in the development of green products continues to be the US Green Building Council’s LEED Rating System (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design), which awards points for the use of certain product types or for the energy or water savings that certain green products can achieve. “LEED continues to spur manufacturers toward market transformation,” said Wilson. GreenSpec users can find products organized by LEED credits as well as by building category and the CSI MasterFormat structure.

- InterfaceFLOR carpet tiles with non-PFC carpet fibers contain no perfluorinated compounds (PFCs), which are ubiquitous in other carpet products. PFCs do not readily break down in the environment, and their long-term health and environmental effects are under investigation by the US EPA and other agencies worldwide as potentially hazardous compounds. The carpet tiles can be specified with high post-consumer recycled content and multiple low-emitting adhesive options.

- Lifeline PVC-free resilient flooring from Upofloor OY (imported by Altro Floors) is made for heavy-traffic commercial spaces yet contains no PVC, plasticizers, phthalates, halogens or heavy metals. Unlike most commercial resilient flooring, Upofloor has a durable wear layer that minimizes the need for maintenance, making it an excellent choice for hospitals, schools and other buildings where indoor environmental quality is a high priority.

- The CI-Girt Rainscreen System from Knight Wall Systems helps keep moisture out of commercial building envelopes while permitting continuous insulation over the steel frame—typically an expensive and labor-intensive hand-cutting process when using other rainscreen systems. Because there are no clips, installation time is reduced and there is far less thermal bridging through the insulation.

- EonCoat waterborne ceramic coating from EonCoat is a truly revolutionary commercial and industrial coating. The water-borne
coating has two parts—phosphoric acid and magnesium hydroxide ("milk of magnesia")—that are mixed in the spray valve during installation and set almost immediately. Available in many colors, EonCoat contains no VOCs and no hazardous air pollutants and has zero flame spread—without the use of a flame retardant.

- **Aqua2use Graywater System** from Water Wise Group collects water from the shower, laundry, lavatory sinks and bath and channels it through a four-stage filtration system into a 21-gallon polyethylene tank to create water suitable for outdoor irrigation. The system’s control box automatically triggers the pump when the tank is filled to distribute the water to irrigation lines; it can also be configured in some situations to rely exclusively on gravity flow instead of a pump.

- **Cypress Envirosystems’ analog-to-digital wireless thermostat** allows controls in existing buildings to be fully digitized to achieve significant energy savings. They effectively bring older buildings into the 21st century, allowing zone-level control and remote management options along with lighting controls and wireless monitoring systems for mechanical equipment. The controls fully integrate with building automation systems and can be installed as a retrofit in less than 30 minutes.

- The **Ritter XL solar thermal system** from Regasol USA combines three unique technologies—advanced evacuated tubes, compound parabolic reflectors and water as a heat-transfer fluid—to create large-scale solar thermal systems for use in commercial, multifamily or industrial applications that have high hot-water demand. The complex systems use a sophisticated freeze-prevention mechanism and can provide high-temperature water year-round, even in cold climates.

- **Mitsubishi ductless heat pumps and variable-refrigerant-flow systems** with tenant submetering supply efficient heating and cooling for residential and commercial applications with a unique tenant submetering feature. Mitsubishi Electric has been at the leading edge of the air-source heat pump revolution in recent years—providing efficient systems that significantly outperform older, unitary heat pumps, even at low outdoor temperatures.

- **AllSun Trackers** from AllEarth Renewables combine photovoltaic collectors, inverters and controls with a ground-mounted tracker that uses GPS to follow the sun precisely as it moves across the sky in order to maximize the amount of light hitting the panels. Upon "waking" in the morning, they tilt to the north to dump accumulated snow, and in high wind they move to a "stow" position parallel with the ground to minimize wind resistance.

- **Philips EnduraLEDs** from Philips Lighting was engineered as a replacement for the 60-watt incandescent light bulb and is the first such LED bulb to be Energy Star-qualified. The bulb has a unique yellow appearance when turned off but provides a warm, white light when turned on; its color temperature is comparable to that of a 60-watt incandescent. This bulb is currently available in a 12.5-watt version with a color rendering index (CRI) of 80, but Philips plans to introduce a 10-watt version with a CRI of 90 in 2012.


**AND THE AWARD GOES TO . . .**

The Awards and Recognition Assn. presents awards to each year’s best awards at its annual gala. One of this year’s award winners was a sand-basted and decorated unopened spumante bottle that was designed for the organizers of a Mardi Gras float.

The award is one that GHA considers perfection—a beautiful recyclable bottle of delicious, sweet, sparkling Spumante decorated with recycled Mardi Gras beads!

Be sure to consider this idea if you’re involved with providing an award anytime soon!

**GHA MEMBER LOGOS . . .**

. . . are posted at greenhotels.com/logos.php for your convenience along with full instructions on how to post a hot-linked version on your website.

**FINAL WORDS . . .**

The ocean as a life-supporting system:
Generates most of the oxygen we breathe,
Helps feed us,
Regulates our climate,
Cleans the water we drink,
Offers us a pharmacopoeia of potential medicines, and
Provides limitless inspiration!