

The Cycle of Recycling

Written by Associated Recyclers of Wisconsin

Saturday, 27 June 2015 11:44 - Last Updated Saturday, 27 June 2015 11:53



STEVENS POINT, WI – Contrary to what recent articles in Forbes, The Wall Street Journal and the Washington Post have stated, recycling is not in a crisis. We, the board of directors of Associated Recyclers of Wisconsin (AROW), believe the authors of these articles are forgetting the basic reasons for and value of recycling.

When the federal Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) was passed in 1976, one of its goals was to reduce the negative impacts of solid waste on human health and the environment. Recycling grew in prominence as a key strategy to achieve that goal. At the same time, a recycling myth also grew in prominence: the notion that recycling would be free and would pay for itself.

Recycling was never meant to be a free service. Recycling is, and always has been, an option that offers a sustainable alternative to landfill disposal. When communities recycle they not only provide a resource for businesses to affordably produce new products, but they also avoid the cost, and potential environmental impacts, of landfill disposal. Even with relatively low disposal rates in the United States, a community that recycles 25% of their 10,000 ton per year waste stream has the potential to save \$125,000 per year in disposal fees (assuming an average \$50/ton disposal fee).

Recyclable materials have value, but depending on global commodity markets, there may not be enough revenue to cover the costs for the entire recycling supply chain; a supply chain that starts wherever we produce recyclables and ends at a factory where new goods are made with the recycled materials. From quarter million dollar collection trucks to multi-million dollar processing facilities, getting a #1 plastic bottle from our homes to a company that will spin the plastic into polyester thread has costs.

The market value for some recyclables is currently down. But, as with all commodities, stocks and bonds, etc., these things do ebb and flow with the global economies. Recycling professionals have seen markets soar to great heights and plummet to sad lows, but always keep focused on the big picture...that recycling is still less expensive than landfilling, both in the short-term and in the entire life-cycle of recyclable materials.

The Cycle of Recycling

Written by Associated Recyclers of Wisconsin

Saturday, 27 June 2015 11:44 - Last Updated Saturday, 27 June 2015 11:53

Yes there are some issues with the recycling system, but they are not issues that cannot be managed and improved. Let's not fall into the trap of using words like "crisis" to describe the current state of cyclical market conditions. The sky is not falling. The board of Associated Recyclers of Wisconsin (AROW) believes that only when we focus on strategies for success can we realize a vibrant and sustainable recycling industry.

###

About the Associated Recyclers of Wisconsin (AROW)

Founded in 1990, AROW is a 501(c)(3) association representing Wisconsin's recycling, waste reduction and sustainability professionals with members from local government, businesses and non-profit groups. The organization provides leadership through education, advocacy, and collaboration and promotes effective, efficient and sustainable material recovery initiatives. For details on AROW, its positions and programs visit www.arow-online.org.