



City of Big Lake Environmental Education Newsletter

November



Recycling: So Much More Than Just Paper and Plastic Working Toward Zero Waste



“Recycling is one of the most important things we can do to protect the environment. We conserve resources. Not only are we preventing environmental contamination on the back end by keeping these materials out of landfills, but we are also protecting the environment by producing less. So from cradle to grave, from start to finish, when we look at a product, to be able to recycle that and reuse it saves tremendous amounts of energy and really protects our air and water.” – Frank Hornstein

Traditional Recycling: What items can be recycled vary by service provider. Most recycling providers in Big Lake accept the basics like all paper items (including junk mail and magazines), cardboard, food container boxes, phone books, plastic bottles, aluminum beverage cans, containers including tubs, lids and caps, metal food cans, and glass bottles and jars.

Water Recycling: Many people are not aware that water can be recycled through various means. The most common ways people recycle water are by collecting or repurposing rainwater. One way to do this is through rainwater harvesting. Rainwater harvesting is often done through rain barrels. Rain barrels are containers used for collecting rainwater from a downspout. They collect roof water runoff that can be stored and used at a later date. The collected rainwater can be used to water your lawn or trees, it is also free of the minerals, chlorine and other chemicals found in city water. Rain barrels can be purchased at a cost between \$70-\$300, but can also be homemade. Another way to recycle water is through raingardens. A rain garden is simply a garden designed to catch rainwater runoff from your roof, yard, or driveway. By creating a slight depression in the garden, you are able to catch and absorb rainwater before it floods into the street or creates a pool in your yard, by allowing it to slowly seep into the ground. The types of plants grown in rain gardens are able to withstand partial flooding, and also create beautiful new landscaping for your yard! More information about both rainwater harvesting and raingardens can be found on the Sherburne County Soil and Water Conservation District webpage.

Food Recycling: As has been mentioned in previous newsletters, food waste is a substantial issue in the United States. But there are many ways people can mitigate this issue through food recycling. The purpose of food recycling is to utilize excess or leftover food to feed someone else, or reuse it to grow new food for the future. Some ways to recycle your food is by donating to food shelves, starting a food scraps to pigs program at your workplace, or by simply composting. The EPA has created a food recovery hierarchy to explain where your leftovers should go first (see image to the right). If you would like any more information about these possibilities, contact Katie Stelzner at kstelzner@biglakemn.org or look on the EPA website



under Sustainable Management of Food.

Solid Waste Recycling: Solid waste recycling is something that is hard to do on the individual level with modern sewage systems. However, the City of Big Lake has invested a lot of time and energy into creating a sustainable wastewater treatment facility. The wastewater treatment facility is able to separate and convert solid waste into biosolids. These biosolids are then taken to nearby farms and used to fertilize the fields. If you would like to learn more about the Big Lake wastewater treatment facility, the City will be offering tours of the site on December, 10th.

Electronic Recycling: Electronics (in their various forms) have become a regular, and often necessary, part of our everyday lives. This means we are consuming and disposing of electronics all the time. Yet few people know what happens to their electronics after disposal. Many end up in landfills, polluting people and the environment through the toxic leaching of chemicals such as lead and mercury. There is an informative documentary on YouTube about the electronic waste stream, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eSgrDOR4bIM>. There are also many places in Minnesota which offer responsible electronic recycling services:

- Central Appliance Recyclers, 3107 Highway 10 S. St. Cloud, MN 56304
 - (320) 252-3221
- Tech Dump, 825 Boone Avenue N, #100 Golden Valley, MN 55427
 - (612)-260-9427
- PC's for People, 1481 Marshall Ave St. Paul, MN 55104
 - (651)-354-2552
- Eureka Recycling, 2828 Kennedy Street NE. Minneapolis, MN 55413
 - (612)-669-2783

These recycling mechanisms are a step toward a world with zero waste. Zero Waste, as defined by the Zero Waste International Alliance, is "designing and managing products and processes to systematically avoid and eliminate the volume and toxicity of waste and materials, conserve and recover all resources, and not burn or bury them." This is an ambitious goal, which will take years, if not decades, to achieve. But every little bit of waste diverted from the landfill will help, so start recycling!

Questions or comments? Or is there a topic you would like to know more about (either from this newsletter or in a future edition)? Email Katie Stelzner at kstelzner@biglakemn.org.