

California exceeds recycling goals

Californians get high on recycling

*Written by RONNY SMITH
Published January 15, 2009*

California is leading the nation in its recycling efforts, according to the California Integrated Waste Management Board, or CIWMB.

California currently diverts 58 percent of its waste to recycling, or about 54 million tons of the 93 million tons of trash it produces each year.

That is saving the equivalent of 100 football fields stacked with trash reaching as high as the Empire State Building. The CIWMB hopes to eventually achieve "Zero Waste," according to the CIWMB website.

Beatriz Sandoval of the CIWMB said she sees these figures as a milestone for California and an example for the rest of the United States.

"It's a whole environmental movement," said Sandoval. "It's about awareness."

Many new laws have been put in place to promote a more environmentally friendly state, such as a 2003 state law making it illegal to throw away television sets. San Francisco also recently implemented a ban on the use of plastic bags in retail and grocery stores. These kinds of laws work to limit the amount of trash placed in landfills. They also help to divert harmful greenhouse gases from landfills, according to Sandoval.

"We are helping ourselves by helping the environment," said Sandoval.

Though the CIWMB proposed expenditures of almost \$200 million for the 2007-2008 fiscal year, Sandoval insists that recycling is worth it.

"It may cost more up front, but in the long-run it's cheaper," said Sandoval. The recycling industry also creates an estimated 85,000 California jobs, generating \$4 billion annually in wages.

"It creates an entire industry."

Some of the biggest problems in recycling are what to do with old electronics, tires and plastic bags. For example, Californians throw out an estimated 42 million tires every year. Only 75 percent of these are recycled.

Even so, there are state services being implemented to alleviate these problems. Private corporations are also helping out.

"We are trying to bring in more companies that take environmental responsibility for their products and services," said Sandoval.

At the local level, Davis ranks as one of the greenest cities in California.

According to Jennifer Gilbert of Davis Waste Management, the City of Davis Recycling Program has received numerous awards from both national and state recycling organizations. In 1986 the National Recycling Coalition named Davis as having the best curbside recycling service in the country. Davis first began offering curbside recycling in 1974.

UC Davis is also doing its part to contribute to a greener California. Senior Patrick Quest of UC Davis leads the R4 Recycling Program at Davis. R4 is responsible for education and promotion of recycling around campus with both students and staff.

"Often people aren't sure if something can be recycled or not," said Quest. "You can always check the R4 website or call R4. Every little effort helps."

R4 sometimes coordinates events with the city of Davis that benefit both parties. For example, last November's Celebrate Davis 2008 was jointly coordinated in its recycling efforts by both R4 and the city of Davis.

R4 also has drop-offs around campus for batteries, CDs and ink cartridges. The drop-off locations can be found on R4's website.

Currently UC Davis recycles almost 70 percent of its waste, the highest rate among all UC campuses. UC Davis is trying to achieve a zero waste rate by 2020 as mandated for all UC campuses by the UC Office of the President.

Jon Gire, a student R4 worker since 2004, cited Student Housing among others as a leader in campus recycling efforts.

"Since world-class faculty, staff, and students continually provide suggestions and support for recycling programs on the UC Davis campus, our recycling program itself is world-class," said Gire.

The biggest obstacle to R4 is the state and UC budget, according to Quest.

"The campus is constantly getting bigger and yet the program remains the same size," said Quest. "We have less resources to do what we want to do than we did a year ago."

Laura Cackette, a third-year environmental science and management major, agrees with Quest. Cackette began working for R4 in August.

"With budget cuts it's hard because recycling is often the first thing thrown out," said Cackette.

Despite monetary obstacles, there are opportunities to help in the recycling movement.

"There are always internships and volunteer efforts available at R4," said Quest. "Just because we're on top doesn't mean we can stop. We have to keep coming up with new ideas and retraining ourselves to recycle."

Sandoval sees California's success as starting with the individual.

"Everyone contributing helps out," said Sandoval. "It's a whole mindset that you have to have. It seems that Californians are starting to have it."

RONNY SMITH can be reached at city@theaggie.org.