

A Conversation On How Recycling Works in New Jersey

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Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

The following is the transcript from a phone conference to learn about recycling in New Jersey held on July 19 with NJDEP Officials: Ross Hull, environmental specialist; Tom Byrne, section chief and Bob Considine, press officer.

DEP Officials:

The (recycling) system has been in place now for 14 years now. This is not a new situation.

Newspaper:

There are seven non-contract towns (that use private trash haulers) in Union County. They pay \$102 per ton of trash to dispose at the Union County Utilities Authority (UCUA), Rahway incinerator. Towns with public employee haulers pay \$60 per ton to dispose at the Rahway incinerator run by Covanta (14 contract towns). There are 21 towns in Union County. Where does recycling go from Union County?

DEP Officials:

It depends what types of materials you are talking about. For residential materials or commercial material that is put at the curb, there is no waste flow on recyclables in New Jersey so that material can go anywhere. If it is source separated, it has to go to a Class A recycling center for further processing before it then is sent to the end market.

Newspaper:

In Westfield you put your aluminum cans and plastic in one container and trash in another that the private hauler picks up. What happens next (to the recycle material)?

DEP Officials:

It depends what that collector does with his recyclables. So when he picks up the recycling container, he cannot mix it with trash at the curb. He has to take that material to a recycling center and if he is following the law, he does.

Newspaper:

And where is the recycling center he takes it to?

DEP Officials:

That would depend on the hauler. It also would depend on the municipality; if the municipality has a contract for recyclables where they bid it out then it would be a town-wide contract and the hauler who picks up the recyclables in the town would take to one of their facilities. Say Waste Management has a contract with a town, then they would take it to their Recycle America - Class A recycle center in Newark.

Newspaper:

Do you know where Westfield recyclables go?

DEP Officials:

There are 566 municipalities in this state so we only get down to the county level (21 counties) not the municipal level. Summit picks their own solid waste, which goes to Summit transfer

station and from there to Covanta's facility (UCUA). Towns can either have a municipality pick it up and then take it to a recycling center; if they have haulers pick it up then they would have to take it to recycling centers. The people who would know where recyclables go — ask the municipal recycling coordinators and the public works departments.

Newspaper:

So we have to call all 21 towns (in Union County) to find out where recyclables are going?

DEP Officials:

Some counties have countywide recycling collection and countywide recycling processing, Somerset County being one example. So Somerset County picks up for the most part all the recyclables for Somerset County. Most counties do not have such a program. Union County does not get directly involved with what the municipalities do with their recyclables. So for Union County, the UCUA is not going to know what everyone of 21 municipalities within their county does with their recyclables.

Newspaper:

Who is responsible for checking the law?

DEP Officials:

Every waste truck has an origination and destination form (O and D) for every load to say where it was generated.

But for recycling that is not the case. It has to go to Class A recycling center where they will ask where material came from and the center will correctly apportion it out when they send their annual tonnage reports to the department. Tonnage reports also go to municipal recycling coordinators.

Newspaper:

If the DEP commissioner wants to increase recycling to 50 percent of waste stream, shouldn't he at least know where it's at least going now?

DEP Officials:

He knows it goes to a licensed Class A recycling center which is where DEP leaves off... The only way they make money is by marketing their materials to an end user. So if they are in business they are making money on the sale and transfer of those Class A recyclables. The DEP maintains a list of Class A recyclable centers.

Newspaper:

Is there a set of records of recycle collections — how much is being sent to centers and from where?

DEP Officials:

You can OPRA that material because it not available on the Internet because as you might imagine it is quite voluminous. If the department knew recyclables were going somewhere it shouldn't be we would investigate and then enforce such action. But to our knowledge Westfield's recyclables, just like everyone else's, are going to licensed facilities.

Newspaper:

And you've never been given any information the contrary?

DEP Officials:

That's correct.

Newspaper:

How do we know that people are separating their recyclable materials correctly from the trash?

DEP Officials:

That's a problem. It's up to enforcement to do that. Unfortunately the state right now doesn't have the enforcement capacity to go to every single house within the State of New Jersey, and every single business so we delegate authority to each county to ensure that there is recycling compliance going on.

Newspaper:

How do we know Summit's is source separating at their transfer station?

DEP Officials:

DEP has municipal data and DEP breaks down each town's recycling rates, and we know which municipalities within which counties are doing a good job and which are not.

Some towns have a very aggressive approach in that if a garage can contain too many recyclables they will put a sticker on it and not pick it up. But Summit, since they are paying for the amount of waste they have to deliver to Covanta (Union County incinerator), they're going to try to increase the amount of recycling that they do because the less waste they send to Covanta the less trucking costs and overall disposal costs they pay.

Summit definitely does a better job than most municipalities in the state and probably in Union County as well.

Newspaper:

You use a statistical basis for the records to determine how well a town versus another is doing?

DEP Officials:

That is correct.

Newspaper:

Do you have inspectors?

DEP Officials:

Yes we do but we don't do any recycling compliance right now unless we receive a complaint. They are usually delegated to the county environmental health agency. It would probably be the Union County health management officer that would do compliance inspections.

Newspaper:

Do you know how many inspectors Union County has?

DEP Officials:

No, you would have to talk to them.

Newspaper:

What is the commissioner's plan again to increase recycling?

DEP Officials:

It's kind of a call for action. DEP Commissioner Martin knows how towns benefit both environmentally and economically by focusing on recycling.

Newspaper:

Do towns get money for increasing/selling their waste to Class A recycling

centers?

DEP Officials:

Most recyclables are worth money right now. Glass being one of the few exceptions. Paper and cardboard varies but it is usually worth up to a \$150 per ton. So you are not only avoiding the tipping fee and incinerator to pay for the disposal of that material, but you are making money by selling that material to end market. So it is a cost avoidance and a cost benefit.

Newspaper:

Do the towns make money by disposing of their recyclable waste to Class A facilities?

DEP Officials:

They make money when they take their recyclable materials to a Class A recycling facility because that facility will then pay them for the amount of material that is brought in.

Newspaper:

Do any of these Class A facilities have separation machines?

DEP Officials:

There are two facilities in the area which do that. Waste Management's Recycle America facility in Newark off Wilson Avenue and Colgate Paper Stock on Industrial Drive in New Brunswick. Both are Class A recycling centers.

Newspaper:

How many of these sophisticated source separation Class A recycling facilities do we have in New Jersey?

DEP Officials:

There are probably at least a half dozen and maybe more.

Newspaper:

Is that enough to make the Commissioner's 50 percent recycling goal?

DEP Officials:

Yes. Class A facilities take aluminum, glass, paper, cardboard, plastics, bottles, milk cartons, etc. Class A facilities cannot do any processing of materials. The closer you are to shipping ports the more money you will make.

Newspaper:

So what is the message that you think we as a newspaper organization should try to give to the public?

DEP Officials:

Recycling has been around a long time, but sometimes people can get lazy about it or forget but if everybody does a little bit we are going to reach that 50 percent state mandatory recycling rate. It is also the law.

DEP Officials:

The department inspects the transfer stations on twice-a-month basis and by designated county agency under the County Environmental Health Act.

Gloucester County is at 50 percent and several others are close. The state of recycling in New Jersey has definitely improved in the last few years and we are getting close to 50 percent goal. Essex County is 40 percent.

Close:

Gentlemen, thank you.

Letters to the Editor

Favorite Tactic of Those Not Wanting To Address Politically Sensitive Issues

I read with interest your recent editorial, "As Property Taxes Soar, Who's Next to Pay Their Fair Share." Your point that "the government's appetite is insatiable" was certainly made. The expansion of community institutions whose purchase of formerly taxable properties should be examined, and criteria for exempting taxing these properties based on their usage should be established. The basic question you pose in the editorial headline was, however, never addressed, perhaps to avoid alienating your readers.

Who's next to pay their fair share? How about religious institutions? Why are they given a full tax exempt status? It seems to me that they use municipal services like everyone else and should pay their fair share of the costs. The argument that religious institutions engage in charitable work is true, but charity is only a portion of their mission. Certainly, to tax them for that good work would be unfair,

but not as unfair as making all taxpayers, believers or not, pay for all the services churches, synagogues, mosques use daily. Moreover, as noted in your editorial, religious institutions can purchase taxed properties, use them for their own purposes, and make them tax exempt with impunity. Is that fair?

The Westfield Leader/Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times offers its readers the opportunity to discuss, rationally, issues facing our communities. It is my hope that any reader commenting on this letter in future editions of this newspaper will avoid irrelevant and personal accusations - a favorite tactic of those who do not want to address politically sensitive issues - and will address the basic question I am asking: Shouldn't religious institutions pay their fair share of taxes?

Robert Petix
Scotch Plains

What Are We Supposed to Do At This Point, Lease Out Mars?

One thing that nobody is mentioning with this LIBOR scandal is the true underlying culprit of our economic misery: fractional reserve banking. True, this scandal is reprehensible but it is only a symptom of the problem — it is not the cause.

At any time in our current economic fiat system there is never enough money to pay off all outstanding debts. This is just a simple fact of fractional reserve banking; and if we were serious about financial reform, it is this 800-pound gorilla in the room that would be dealt with.

The global derivatives market alone, never mind all the other complex financial instruments, is something to the order of about 10 to 12 times the global G.D.P.! What are we supposed to do at this point, lease out Mars as collateral?

We could solve this problem by perhaps going back to a tangible reserve monetary system that not only includes gold but many other commodities as well. Or if you want to keep the banking multiplier effect to keep fluid liquidity you could establish a public trust-type of a corporation that would own any property foreclosed by the banks — and could redistribute it as needed in times of

emergency — for the banks themselves do not really in all fairness have the capital requirements to ethically justify owning the confiscated property with a fractional reserve system.

If they did, there would be no such thing as a bank run when the reverse process happens — but of course when that happens a public trust-type of corporation known as a central bank bails them out.

Why cannot the general public have the same dignity? Instead, the common man is being asked to endure a quality of life decrease through austerity which will only cause conflicts down the road, for no amount of self-sacrifice will ever be good enough to balance the budgets of our current financial institution's books.

It is time we face this problem for the current status quo is untenable.

Joseph Hrevnack
N. Brunswick

Judges Are Exempt

TRENTON — Supreme Court Judges ruled Tuesday that judges don't have to contribute more for health care and pensions.

The state has argued health benefits and pensions are separate from judicial salaries.

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