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## Blue Bins And Yellow Bags Help Green Stonington

Economic Incentives Help To Create High Recycling Rates

By Bree Shirvell | Email the author | January 11, 2011

1 Comment

Reduce, reuse, recycle—it's the motto of environmentalists everywhere and one Stonington residents seem to be embracing.

Each week in neighborhoods around Stonington, blue recycling bins turn sidewalks into waves of environmental consciousness, filled with plastic bottles, assorted papers and various other now empty products.

The town's single-stream curbside recycling program—allowing for the commingling of all recyclables into a single bin—is one of the ways residents can, and do, recycle.

Stonington is one of the roughly 8,660 communities with curbside recycling programs in the U.S. and one of a growing number that shifted to single-stream, including, locally, [Waterford](#) and soon, [Ledyard](#).

According to [Town Solid Waste and Recycling Manager John Phetteplace](#), Stonington began its first curbside recycling program in 1988, 14 years after the first municipal wide recycling program in the U.S. started in University City, Missouri.

"There's the opportunity for everyone to recycle," Phetteplace said.

In the past few years, the overall number of curbside recycling programs decreased nationwide. The [Environmental Protection Agency](#) counts municipal wide curbside recycling programs every few years, and between 2002 and 2008, the U.S. saw a drop from 8,875 to 8,660. The decrease in programs is likely the result of the economy, when many municipalities just couldn't afford their recycling programs.

According to Stonington First Selectman Edward Haberek Jr., at the beginning of 2010 the market value price of some metals and papers dropped and Stonington had to pay to have the goods discarded, instead of making money off the recycling program. But unlike other towns, Stonington saw a rebound in the latter half of the year, and once again was making money from the program.

Despite the economy, curbside recycling programs continue to serve approximately half of the U.S. population. But when it comes to which towns in Connecticut recycle more, Stonington has most places beat.

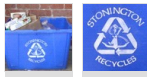
"We have one of the highest recycling rates in the state," Haberek said.

While exact numbers are difficult to gauge, according to Phetteplace the town recycles slightly more than 40 percent of its trash. That number is higher than the national average, which in 2008

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according to EPA, the last year data is available for, was 33 percent. It is also significantly higher than Connecticut's statewide average, which in 2008 according to the [Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection Program](#) was approximately 25 to 26 percent.

The town's single-stream recycling program, combined with its pay-as-you-throw trash collection, is cited by the state DEP as an example of an effective recycling program. Stonington is one of only 15 municipalities to make the state DEP's [Recycling Municipality Honor Roll](#).

Phetteplace says the reason Stonington switched to single-stream recycling was because the processing site used single-stream recycling, in addition to it being a more efficient and economical method for picking up and processing the recycled materials.

"It's more convenient, but we don't expect to see the bump in recycling other towns are seeing," Phetteplace said.

One of those reasons is because Stonington is one of the few towns in this area that uses a pay-by-the-bag or pay-as-you-throw system. Residents have to buy special yellow bags for their garbage. These bags, available at local stores, come in two sizes; a package of five 33-gallon bags costs \$6.25 and a package of five 15-gallon bags costs \$3.75.

"We're pretty much recycling everything there is to recycle," Phetteplace said.