

## **Why Recycling Is So Important**

By Karen Powers Liebhaber

Did you know that you create 5 pounds of trash in one day? In one year, you create 1,825 pounds of trash by yourself. Pocahontas, with its population of around 7,000 people, creates 35,000 pounds. That's 17.5 tons a DAY! In a year, Pocahontas citizens create almost 13 MILLION pounds of garbage, over 638 tons. The approximately 18,500 residents of Randolph County create 92,500 pounds, or 46.25 tons, of garbage a day, almost 34 million pounds, 16,881.25 tons, a year. According to Teal Beattie at AboutMyPlanet.com, America creates 404,271 tons of garbage in one day. These numbers alone show you the tremendous problem American is having with its garbage.

We have become a throwaway society. A drink from McDonald's is provided in a one-use cup. Our burgers come in a paper box, which we toss. Our fries come in a small paper bag. All of it comes in a bigger bag. We throw every bit of it in the trash, hopefully, or on the side of the road. If we purchase a Barbie from Wal-Mart, we get a plastic bag to carry it in, which we throw away, and enough packaging—provided you can actually get to the toy without having to use 911's Jaws of Life—to box up three burgers, which we toss. When you clean your house, you probably use the newest cleaning invention, one of the barrage of disposable products: Swiffer dusters, Swiffer vacs, Swiffer mops, Windex Wipes, Pledge Wipes, Clorox Wipes. If you have a baby, you're probably one of the millions who uses disposable wipes and diapers.

We are burying ourselves with garbage!

Our landfills are growing. But what is worse than overflowing is that the landfills themselves are a growing environmental hazard. For example, once added to a landfill, electronics such as computers, cell phones, and VCRs leak dangerous toxins including arsenic, mercury, and lead. These toxins bleed into the ground and can pollute the ground water. Beattie estimates that there are approximately 550 million used mobile phones waiting to be discarded, and all but 1% will end up leaching toxins in the landfill.

Plastics are another problem. One plastic water bottle takes 1,000 years to biodegrade. Solive Karlstrom at *The Green Guide* says that, considering that 22 billion water bottles were thrown in the trash last year instead of the recycle bin, valuable landfill space is consumed. Plastic bags are another big space waster. Less than 1% of plastic bags are recycled in the U.S. although worldwide there were 4-5 trillion of them made in 2002. Plastic bags are such an environmental problem that the Boston City Council in Boston, Massachusetts, wants to ban them.

Even scarier, Beattie explains, is that landfills produce 34% of all human-created methane gas. They produce more methane gas than any other man-made product. Methane, which is one of the most destructive greenhouse gasses, is ten times more potent than carbon dioxide in furthering global warming. And Beattie offers this astounding fact: a 6-month-old American baby has used as many resources as the average person in a developing country uses in an entire lifetime.

Recycling not only reduces the amount of trash in our overloaded and quickly filling landfills, it saves energy when used in producing new materials, reduces the need for new resources, reduces pollution, and uses fewer chemicals when producing new

materials, Beattie says. One ton of recycled material saves 2.5 cubic yards (67.5 cubic feet) of room in a landfill.

You might be surprised at the recycling opportunities available to you in the Pocahontas area.

- Contact the Pocahontas mayor's office for details about their Friday recycling pick-up. This service will take, with some requirements, clear glass, aluminum, scrap metal, plastic bottles and bags, cardboard, chipboard like cereal boxes, household appliances, motor oil, batteries, newsprint, paper, and electronics.
- Dell computers will recycle any Dell-branded product for free. If you purchase a Dell computer, select the free recycling option and they will recycle any old PC and monitor for free, even if it is not a Dell. Access [http://www.dell.com/content/topics/segtopic.aspx/dell\\_recycling?c=us&cs=19&l=en&s=dhs](http://www.dell.com/content/topics/segtopic.aspx/dell_recycling?c=us&cs=19&l=en&s=dhs) for more information.
- If you have a proof of purchase from when you bought your Gateway or eMachines computer, Gateway will actually pay you to return your old computer to them. If you don't have a proof of purchase, they offer several other recycling programs on this website: [http://www.gateway.com/about/corp\\_responsibility/env\\_recycle.php](http://www.gateway.com/about/corp_responsibility/env_recycle.php).
- For those of you in the minority who have Macs, you can return any computer and monitor, even if it isn't a Mac, to Apple for free when buying a new Mac. Access <http://www.apple.com/environment/recycling/program/index.html> for more information.

- iPod and cell phone users can return their iPods and cell phones to Apple for free: <http://www.apple.com/environment/recycling/ipodrecycling/>. If you run across an Apple store, drop off your cell phone or Apple product batteries.
- AT&T, formerly Cingular, encourages all cell phone users, regardless of their carrier, to return their phones, batteries, accessories, and PDAs to Cellular Advantage where their used phones will either be converted for use with 911 and emergency facilities or returned to the company for recycling. Customers may also return them online by visiting <http://www.wireless.att.com/about/community-support/recycling.jsp>.
- Alltel customers can contact their store or access <http://www.recycleforus.com/free-recycling.asp> to receive a free shipping label to return cell phones, accessories, batteries, and PDS.
- Don't forget that you can drop your plastic bags off at Wal-Mart's recycling boxes located just inside their doors.

Another great way to save landfills is to find ways to reuse items. For example, I've found the greatest cleaning invention ever, thanks to my friend Tara: the Swiffer vac. But not long before I wrote this article, I started feeling guilty about throwing away the one-use Swiffer pads that go on the vac. A quick rummage through my scrap cleaning cloths revealed some old flour-sac-type dishcloths. I cut the cloths into the same size as the Swiffer pads and *voila!* I have reusable Swiffer pads. And I save money by not buying the disposable kind. Finally, composting is a great way to turn your old foods, leaves, and grass clippings into a useful fertilizer that naturally repels many bugs.

So do your part and remember, recycling in Pocahontas and Randolph County is easier than you think!