

Packaging: Problems and Possibilities for Recycling

Presented at MicroGreen
October 15, 2013

The logo for Seattle Public Utilities, featuring a stylized globe icon to the left of the text "Seattle Public Utilities".

Seattle
Public
Utilities

Dick Lilly, Manager
Waste Prevention and Product Stewardship
Solid Waste Utility

A brief look back:

- ❑ Lots of types of packaging are new to recycling.**
- ❑ We've always recycled beverage containers (including glass) and cardboard.**
- ❑ PET and HDPE bottles have a long history.**
- ❑ But before 2009, in Seattle and much of the metropolitan area, most coated papers and 3-7 plastics weren't part of our curbside ("blue bin") programs.**

We added food service packaging in 2010.

Compostable

- As a way to capture food waste.
- This is the preferred alternative.

Or recyclable

- Which, unfortunately, presents contamination problems:
 - Plastic in the compost
 - Yucky food at the MRF
- Will be limited to take-out.

Seattle 2012 recycling rates*.

☐ Single family

▪ 71.1%

☐ Multi family

▪ 32.2%

☐ Commercial

▪ 61.4%

☐ Combined

▪ 55.7%

4 ▪ *Includes composting.

Challenges.

What is it?

- ❑ With a great variety of materials out there, consumers are unsure what's recyclable or compostable and what to do with it.
- ❑ Cities' public education budgets are severely limited.
- ❑ Better labeling is essential, and that depends on the packaging industry.

Challenges.

Recycling markets.

❑ Cross contamination

- Glass
- Coated papers
- Less valuable plastics

❑ Shipping costs

❑ The “Green Fence”

Challenges.

New materials.



- ❑ With the best of intentions – “zero waste,” “sustainability,” new, lighter packaging materials are coming on the market.
- ❑ But sometimes they can’t be recycled in our existing systems.
- ❑ Some flexible packaging is an example – complex laminates, etc.
- ❑ Is WTE really “sustainable?”

Moving forward.

What's needed.

□ Packaging industry collaboration with the solid waste (materials reuse and recycling) industry and state and local governments.

- Already started – PacNEXT, SPC, others

□ Several key areas:

- Consumer education
- Design for reuse or recycling
- Product stewardship

Packaging: Problems and Possibilities for Recycling

Presented at MicroGreen
October 15, 2013

Dick Lilly, Manager
Waste Prevention and Product Stewardship
Solid Waste Utility

Seattle
Public
Utilities