

# Meeting Notes

## Recycling Stakeholders

March 28, 2018

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Please send corrections, edits, or additions to [alli.kingfisher@ecy.wa.gov](mailto:alli.kingfisher@ecy.wa.gov) by April 20, 2018

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### Meeting Objectives

- To share information about the impacts of National Sword on stakeholders across Washington
- Draft list of near- and long-term solutions

### General Notes on Discussion

- Ecology is committed to listening and facilitating stakeholder dialogue on recent changes to recycling due to the National Sword/Blue Sky issues.
- Mixed paper is the biggest problem now. Some recyclers are stockpiling paper. Even #12 corrugated (grocery store bales) are hard to get to China now. Pricing is awful. In one rural county, cardboard (OCC) and mixed paper (MWP) become apple trays.
- For some, plastics are moving better than they were but still are very slow. For others mixed plastics are not being accepted by their recyclers. In some rural areas, only #1 bottles and #2 jugs are accepted. In other rural areas no plastics are being accepted including #1 PET thermoforms (clamshells).
- Alternate locations in Southeast Asia such as India, Vietnam and Indonesia are reaching capacity in accepting the overflow from China. Because the technology in other countries to clean materials is less robust than what was available in China these other countries require higher standards of material than what China had been able to process.
- Some MRFs are storing materials outside as they have reached capacity for storing materials inside. The concern is the degrading value for the materials and maintaining the value of the material for the future. If the quality of the material degrades then the materials may need to be landfilled.
- There was discussion on the value of sorting out #3-7 plastics when the value lies in the #5 PP. Should there be more sorting or change to only collect the #5 dairy tubs?

- Merlin Plastics in British Columbia has the capacity to sort and process mixed plastic bales but there is a cost to transport the material there and to have it sorted. Merlin's concern is that there will not be a long term flow of material if a cheaper market such as Vietnam opens up to process the material.
- Agreements between local jurisdictions and their collectors and processors vary across the board. In some cases (Seattle) they have a different contractual model in that they bare all the risk and not their processor. They are closely watching the market.
- Focus messaging to the public on recycling right: what's on the list; empty, clean and dry. Need to emphasize overall contamination reduction. Moisture is now considered a contaminate.
- Processors report slowing down the lines, adding staff and upgrading equipment to reduce contamination.
- It was reported that Republic Services had requested, one-time permission to landfill unmarketable mixed paper. Reportedly 22 of 24 jurisdiction had approved the variance requests to landfill material. Seattle and King County have denied that request after doing research on markets.
- Within WUTC areas, Waste Management has filed for a surcharge. There were reports that at least some haulers are charging recycling surcharges to their commercial open market recycling accounts in the Greater Seattle Area. No reports of requests (yet) for a recycling surcharge for contracted service. One participant stated their processor is doubling their processing costs.
- The sizing of containers often dictates what ends up in either the recycling or garbage cart. Garbage carts are paid for by size but everyone gets a large recycling cart. This system is upside-down. To encourage cleaner recyclables you should penalize contamination. Some materials such as plastic bags invite more contamination.
- Effort should be taken to not place all of the blame on the consumer. Some has to do with the fact that our system consists of all independent programs and that we don't have the financing to properly sort the materials.
- Materials that are placed into the cart should have strong end markets. The first step is to emphasize clean materials. More outreach is needed to consumers to clean up the incoming stream.
- Recycling is not free. Having recycling embedded in the system, and the perception that it is 'free' is contributing to the contamination issue. There may be a cost to recycle and you can't rely on markets to cover the costs. If we don't want material to end up in landfills then we need examine the true costs. We need to look at how to cover those costs over the short, middle and long term because the domestic markets do not yet exist.

- Need to look at a whole different system for financing and putting the economic system in the right place. Put the manufacturers of the packaging and printed papers in the equation. They're the ones making the material. Why shouldn't they have a role in funding the back end? Producer-funded programs have been in place in Europe (1994), Asia, and Canada a long time. Europe's is similar to the newer Canadian model, which is very interesting to look at.
- Recycling isn't recycling until you replace virgin feedstock.
- It is a shame to waste a good disaster. This is a great opportunity to recreate the system.
- We have to keep the material moving or we will lose the infrastructure. Even if we need to subsidize the cost for recycling now we need to safeguard the investment in infrastructure.

### **Looking to the future – Solutions (brainstorm)**

- Encourage the development of domestic markets. Build more processing capacity beyond Merlin Plastics in B.C. and to developing markets in Washington and Oregon.
- Examine recycled content legislation options.
- Examine other possible legislation.
- Standardize what is collected for recycling across the region based on market conditions. It's not another discard method, it's about creating commodities for new product.
- Continue to develop the work from the King County/Seattle Public Utilities Plastic Summit. Documents from that meeting are located here:  
<https://www.kingcounty.gov/depts/dnrp/solid-waste/programs/linkup/documents.aspx>
- Pyrolysis is complicated because of the necessity of separation of different plastic resins. It also has issues related to air emissions.
- Advance the results from the [Improving Commingled in NW Washington Report](#) and Education and Messaging workgroup.
- Pursue the work that was outlined in SHB 2914 and pursue similar legislation in 2019 to have Commerce study the economics of recycling in Washington.
- Many people commented on needing to get manufacturers involved. Options included pursuing extended producer responsibility or a bottle bill. It was referenced there are many models to look at.

- Further study the feasibility of siting a secondary MRF on the west coast. There would need to be commitments from local governments and local MRFs to ensure there is adequate minimum material flows to the facility.
- There is a need for Ecology to coordinate messaging on why changes are being made to local programming and why some material is being landfilled. Local programs want to refer to Ecology as to why this is not just a local problem. Also coordinated messaging on what materials to collect. Do we want the message to the public to be is “landfilling recyclables is OK” or “You need to pay more to get it recycled.”
- Need to change the perception that recycling is ‘free.’ This might involve restructuring charges for refuse and recycling services.
- Suggested key messages: Empty, clean dry. Only what is accepted in your local system.
- Local jurisdictions and MRFs need to work together in regards to solid waste management plans and contract agreements.

## **Next Steps**

- Ecology will organize monthly meetings to facilitate information sharing between interested stakeholders.
- Ecology will continue organizing the Commingled Education and Messaging meeting to develop best management practices and outreach materials.
- Explore the development of a steering committee to identify further areas of work.