



RECYCLING NEWS

RECYCLING TEXTILES

Company Helps Townships Turn Clothing Cast-Offs into Cash

Townships can add used clothing and small household items to the list of recyclables they can divert from landfills thanks to a company that collects those items for reuse. Recycle Local works with townships and other agencies to remove textiles from the waste stream, not only saving landfill space but also generating some revenue for the municipality.

BY BRENDA WILT / ASSOCIATE EDITOR

When Northmoreland Township in Wyoming County had its spring cleanup in May, it was able to collect more than the usual bulky items and make a little money to boot.

Thanks to the help of Recycle Local, a textile and household item recycling company, residents were able to recycle their used clothing and small household items, rather than trash them, and the

township was paid by the pound for the materials the organization collected.

“We did very well because we saved a whole dumpster full of stuff that would have gone to a landfill,” township secretary-treasurer Judy Rusinko says.

Even better, at the end of the event, the township received a check for \$292.

“We were well-satisfied,” Rusinko says, “and would recommend [Recycle Local] to anyone.”

That’s music to the ears of Jesse Young, Recycle Local’s director of community relations. “We provide sig-





ABOVE: Judy Rusinko, the secretary-treasurer of Northmoreland Township in Wyoming County, displays the check the township received from Recycle Local after the organization collected used clothing and textiles during the community cleanup day. **LEFT:** Recycle Local's Aaron Santee, far left, and Jesse Young join Rusinko for the cleanup. (Photos courtesy of Recycle Local.)

nificant opportunities for local governments to really have an impact on the environment," he says.

By helping townships, schools, and other organizations identify and collect materials that are 100 percent recyclable but don't easily fit into the standard recycling program, Recycle Local is striving to meet its stated goal of "saving the planet one community at a time."

Working with townships

Recycle Local was established in 1969 as a full-service textile and household item recycling company. In addition to used clothing, it accepts shoes, household textiles such as drapes, sheets, and towels, small appliances, cookware, and electronics. It operates in most of the eastern half of Pennsylvania.

Lest you think there is little need for recycling textiles, think again. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

estimates that America generates about 25 billion pounds of textiles each year, or roughly 82 pounds per person. Some 13 million tons of textile waste are generated each year, accounting for 5.3 percent of the total municipal solid waste stream. Of that, only about 15 percent is donated or recycled, leaving 85 percent, or 21 billion pounds, going to landfills. That textile waste takes up 196 million cubic yards of landfill space every year.

To make matters worse, between 1999 and 2009, the volume of post-consumer textile waste increased 40 percent, while the amount diverted from landfills increased only 2 percent. Clearly, there is a need for textile recycling.

Enter Recycle Local. The company helps local governments, waste management agencies, primary and secondary educational institutions, churches, and civic organizations develop long-term textile recycling programs at no cost to the host agency.

One way the company works with townships is by offering to participate in cleanup events, Young says.

In addition to Northmoreland Township, Recycle Local also contacted Kingston Township in Luzerne County to participate in its cleanup event last May.

"It was the first time we worked with them," assistant township manager Karen Rose says. "Their people looked through what residents brought to dispose of and took what could be salvaged."

Rose says that having the textiles and other items diverted freed up space in the roll-off containers. It also reduced the amount of material going to the landfill and gave the township a little bit of money. Having collected about 6,000 pounds of recyclables, Recycle Local presented a \$308 check to the township.

The company was present for all six





days of the cleanup, and its representatives even helped unload vehicles when weren't busy.

"We definitely plan on using them again," Rose says.

Removing the risk

Another way that Recycle Local works with local governments is by placing collection containers in municipalities. Northmoreland Township will soon have a container near the municipal building.

"Northmoreland Township collects



Recycle Local's Jesse Young, left, presents a check to (left to right) Kingston Township assistant manager Karen Rose, vice chair Shirley Moyer, and supervisor Samuel Barbosa following a cleanup in the township. Recycle Local collected more than three tons of recyclable clothing and textiles during the week-long event. (Photo courtesy of Recycle Local.)

the traditional recyclables at a municipal drop-off location," Young says. "Recycle Local is going to put a used-clothing 'shed' right next to the roll-off container. It will be a good model to show the potential for other municipalities."

Recycle Local owns and maintains

all the containers and takes care of emptying them. Young recognizes that the prospect of recycling clothing and other textiles, including sheets and towels, can be daunting.

"It can be scary when a township starts thinking about how it would collect it and then what it would do with it," he says. "We take all the risk out of it for townships."

There is absolutely no cost to the township, and Recycle Local adds the municipality as an additional insured on its liability insurance, Young says. At the same time, an ongoing collection program can reduce waste bills and generate revenue.

"We provide significant opportunities for local governments to really have an impact on the environment."

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Recycling textiles

Recycle Local facilitates collection of recyclables; it does not process them. The company works with a large network of thrift stores, which sort the items and keep or divert them as appropriate.

Reusable clothing and shoes are sold in the thrift stores or shipped overseas. Some unusable textiles become industrial rags. Natural and some synthetic fibers can be broken down into raw materials for new products, such as stuffing, insulation, and carpet underlayments. Zippers, buttons, and other pieces can all be recycled. Rubber soles from shoes can be turned into mulch. Even stuffed animals and dolls can be recycled.

"Most people have no idea how much clothing and textiles they can recycle," Young says. "We want to change that."

For more information about Recycle Local, go to www.recyclelocal.net or call Jesse Young at (484) 707-3108 or email jesse@recyclelocal.net. ♦