
INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM

TO: DR. ARCHIBALD

FROM: ZACH ALVA

SUBJECT: RECOLOGY TRIP SUMMARY

DATE: 10/25/19

CC: HECTOR HERNANDEZ

Purpose

The purpose of this memo is to describe aspects of the Engr115 class trip to Recology information about Recology, recycling statistics for this particular facility, how the facility processed recycled waste, as well as general information about the recycling industry. All information given in this memo is cited from the field trip, which was primarily guided by the Samoa plant manager.

Discussion

Recology is a west coast wide recycle company that serves California, Oregon, and Washington. According to the plant manager, Recology is the largest recycling company in the United States. The Samoa plant takes in roughly 60-80 tons of recycle per day from all around Humboldt County, and around 45 tons per week from Ashland, Oregon, processes it, and sells as much of it as is viable. This sounds like a massive number; however, it is dwarfed by the amount of recycle that is processed in the Bay Area. By comparison, the San Francisco Recology plant processes roughly 1000 tons per day. Overall, the recycling market is down 75% on scrap and materials in recent years. Additionally, countries such as China and Indonesia that purchase American recycling have tightened their standards on the allowable amount of landfill contamination acceptable in the recycling they purchase. At the Samoa plant, the bales of recyclables contain about 8% landfill contamination, which is brought down from roughly 25% incoming contamination. This metric actually indicates success, as the mandate for contamination is no more than 10%. By comparison, the landfill contamination in the Bay Area plants is between 35-40% landfill contamination. Part of the reason this is such a small number is the fact that the Samoa plant is dealing with a much smaller amount of recycling to process. Recology sends their newspaper to China and Indonesia, which does not accept the product unless it is less than 0.5% contaminated. Cardboard is sent to Oregon and is then exported.

All incoming recycling is piled up on the floor in the main warehouse. A tractor feeds the recycling onto a conveyor belt, where the cardboard and non-recyclables are separated by hand. The next element of waste to be sifted out is all of the glass, which is broken and sent on another conveyor belt to be processed. At the same time that the glass is separated, all of the lighter paper is separated as well. All metals are transported further, and then separated by type. Finally, when

there is enough of one type of waste, it is processed into bales by the baler, to then be transported and sold.

Conclusion

Recycling is an industry that is the by-product of the warped mind frame of American society. While it is an incredible process that greatly reduces the amount of resources that are wasted by being thrown into the landfill, one of the major takeaways from the field trip is that the way Americans think about and handle their solid waste has to change in order for recycling to be anything more than a band-aid for a much larger problem. Part of this is raising awareness about what is indeed recyclable versus what is landfill. This can come from policy change as well as education. In the city of Eureka, Recology's contract with the city does not include public outreach, so they have very little recourse as of now to contribute to the educational side of things. Having said this, Recology is working with California districts such as Sonoma and Humboldt County's to create a red flag system so that any citizens who repeatedly abuse the privilege of recycling by contaminating their recycling waste with landfill will have to pay an additional fee. Small acts such as these will make a difference; however, in order for the problem to be directed towards a solution, large scale change in how America processes it's waste must be made.