

Date: Sun 12-Sep-2004
Publication: dh
Category: biz
Author: lopez
Location: 4c

Recycling's local benefits touted

Durango business owners urged to consider their values

By Mary Ann Lopez
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Businesses in La Plata County need to recycle to lower refuse bills, increase marketing opportunities and improve the environment, a group was told at Wednesday's Green Business Roundtable luncheon.

Recycling means more than saving space in landfills; **recycling** most products saves energy and natural resources, according to the owner of Phoenix **Recycling**.

"The bottom line is in the minds of average Americans we associate the **benefits of recycling** with landfills," said Mark Thompson, owner of Phoenix **Recycling**. With only a few exceptions, he said, "Most of the **benefits of recycling** are on the manufacturing side. Anything you recycle is going to take less energy, less water and put off fewer pollutants in the environment."

La Plata County recycles roughly 6 percent of its waste, compared with the national average of 28 percent to 30 percent, Thompson said. The **local** figure was calculated using the county's total population, the average daily waste production per person, 4.4 pounds -- based on numbers from the Environmental Protection Agency -- and the amount of material processed at the Durango **Recycling** Center.

The reasons to recycle are related to saving energy and protecting the environment's natural resources, which are used to manufacture new products, he said.

According to a 2001 study in Australia, **recycling** reduces landfill use, releases fewer pollutants and gases into the environment, and reduces the use of natural resources, such as land, trees or water, to manufacture items.

For a business, the first item to recycle is corrugated cardboard, Thompson said. When the cardboard is diverted from trash cans, refuse bills are lower because there is less trash to collect.

Businesses' values often dictate whether other items, such as glass, cans or aluminum, are recycled, Thompson said. One benefit to **recycling** basic items such as aluminum or paper is that customers or employees who know a business recycles will spread the word, and **recycling** turns into a positive marketing tool.

Jeff Baker, a general manager and part-owner at Steamworks Brewing Co., said the business has recycled for about seven years.

"In the beginning there was nobody to pick it up," he said. "We still did it."

The brewery primarily recycles cardboard, newspaper and cans. To make **recycling** easy for employees, there are six locations behind the bar where bottles are tossed, Baker said. And employees' shift duties include tossing recyclable items into the right bin for **recycling**.

The business is also working to convert its vehicles to biodiesel using grease from the kitchen.

Alex Arribau, owner of Phoenix Data Protection, an offshoot of the **recycling** company which shreds and recycles documents, said that although the United States makes up less than 5 percent of the world's population, it uses 30 percent of the paper produced. She said the paper industry is the fifth largest energy user.

Business cannot survive without paper, but Arribau said options to reduce paper use include

using both sides of paper, **recycling** paper waste and using paper with a post-consumer content, which means a certain portion is recycled and diverted from a landfill.

From a marketing perspective, businesses should make it known to customers that they recycle or use "green" products, like toilet paper. She said, "It shows what a business' values are."

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