

Are you keeping current with recycling rules?

By Michael Kooi

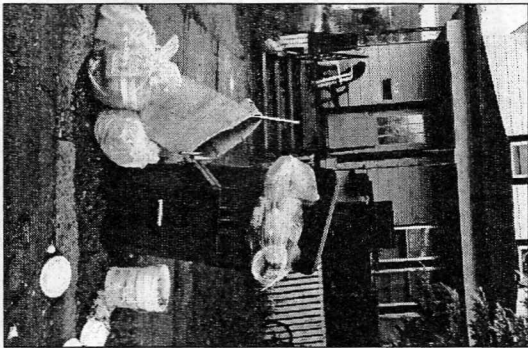
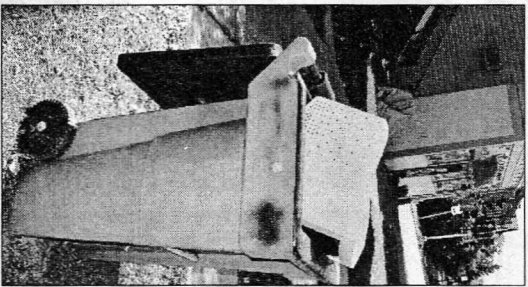
Mention the word "stream" to most Duluthians and you'll likely conjure images of crisp, copper-colored water, gurgling currents and perhaps the occasional brook trout. In the effort to keep the city's water free from toxins, however, streams of empty pop cans, discarded televisions and rubber tires figure just as prominently.

Thanks to advances in technology and changes in consumer behavior, Duluth's waste streams (i.e. the types of refuse it produces) continue to multiply and evolve, along with the rules that govern them. To keep up with the rules regarding waste, residents should check periodically with their waste haulers and the Western Lake Superior Sanitary District (WLSSD).

Current rules

By law, all residents must recycle — either through a service offered by their waste haulers or by taking recyclable materials to recycling centers themselves. To accommodate this requirement, the law also requires every waste hauler to provide its customers with the opportunity to recycle as part of their trash service. In effect, residents who currently pay to have their garbage picked up — but don't recycle — are already paying for recycling service. To begin recycling, they merely need

Ignorance or apathy? RIGHT: Recyclables mixed in with regular garbage. LEFT: A computer monitor dumped illegally in the trash.



Photos by Naomi Yaeger-Bischoff

to use their recycling containers or request containers from their haulers.

Effective recycling requires knowing which items belong in the recycling bin, which items belong in the garbage, and which items belong in neither. Homeowners and renters can contact their waste haulers for containers, lists of accepted items and instructions on how to sort them.

Most area haulers accept plastics bearing polymer or resin identification codes #1-7, paper (including office paper, newspaper and packaging such as cereal boxes), clean and flattened cardboard (no greasy pizza boxes), glass bottles and metal food cans. Food containers should be rinsed clean and caps should be removed from plastics and glass.

Some residents may consider this old news, but the loads of garbage processed by the WLSSD suggest otherwise. "We found \$1 million worth of aluminum on our tipping floor [where incoming loads are dumped] last year," notes Karen Anderson, WLSSD's director of community relations. The district does not have the resources to remove these materials so they remain in the trash.

Conversely, if an item does not appear on a hauler's list of accepted materials, it does not belong in a recycling container. Plastic bags (even those with HDPE recycling symbols), for example, are the most common contaminants in curbside loads, according to Dan Hartel, co-owner of Hartel's/DBJ Disposal.

"People put them out assuming that because they're plastic, they'll get recycled," he explains. In actuality, most haulers cannot recycle the bags because no market for these plastics exists in the Northland.

Other items banned from the trash include televisions and computer monitors, other electronics, major appliances like refrigerators and microwaves, tires, household hazardous waste (including paints, solvents and cleaning products) and yard waste. (A complete list of these items and some suggested resources for disposing of them can be found at www.wlssd.duluth.mn.us/garbagebanned.php.)

In addition, residents can recycle furniture and clothing through charitable organizations and the WLSSD's Materials Recovery Center, which also accepts scrap metal, mattresses and building materials (the latter two for a fee).

By separating waste in this way, homeowners can capture more than just environmental benefits. "Many of our customers have requested smaller garbage containers since we introduced our single-stream recycling service," says Darlene Blascoe of Nordic Waste. In short, the more materials residents can fish out of their personal waste streams, the more money they can save on their garbage bills.

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Recycling for renters

While the prospect of cost savings provides homeowners with a straightforward incentive to recycle, the motivation for renters is less clear cut. Under the law, the financial responsibility to haul waste from dwellings with four or less units lies with the landlord OR the occupant. Like homeowners, renters who pay for their own waste removal should receive recycling pick-up as part of that service – and thus can reduce their hauling bills by recycling. In the case of dwellings with more than four units, the landlord is responsible for arranging for waste hauling. Therefore, landlords stand to benefit from the reduced trash hauling costs that result from recycling (at least theoretically), while residents pay the same monthly rent regardless of how much they recycle.

This relative lack of incentive for renters can lead to diminished participation in neighborhoods with high percentages of rental properties, such as the Hillside and Lincoln Park. Dan Hartel acknowledges that the Hillside offers its share of such challenges, thanks mostly to the yearly turnover of students (many of whom use different recycling systems in their home towns), but “we’ve also made great progress” in increasing participation in the neighborhood. A 2007 WLSSD public opinion study may bear this out: Nearly 88 percent of Hillside and Lincoln Park residents (based on responses from ZIP codes 55802, 55805 and 55807) indicated that they recycle.

Whatever their motivations, renters who wish to recycle have the law on their sides. The current WLSSD ordinance requires that all residents be given the opportunity to recycle. Most often, haulers fulfill this requirement by providing recycling containers along with or alongside regular trash containers and dumpsters. Renters who have not received containers or do not know the location of their recycling dumpster can contact their landlords or management companies, or their haulers. If such a container has not been provided, the renter has the right to request one.

To find out what items belong in the container, renters can consult their move-in materials (if provided), or call their haulers directly. Legal responsibility for providing this information and other recycling education to residents actually rests with the haulers, so they are probably the best resource.

Cans and Bottles are Banned from the Trash.



Pop cans and plastic bottles must be recycled. It's the law.

For information about recycling, call the WLSSD Hotline at 218-722-0761.



Western Lake Superior
Sanitary District
www.wlssd.com

Think before you throw