From Throw-Aways to (Nearly) Zero Waste In the Quick-Serve Restaurant Industry: Seattle's Solution to a Packaging Problem

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Dick Lilly
Manager, Waste Prevention and Product Stewardship
Seattle Public Utilities
dick.lilly@seattle.gov
206.615.0706

Sustainability in simple terms…

- *Means being able to do the same thing or produce the same thing, the same product, over and over without drawing down the world's limited resources.*
- That has to include recovering the materials used to make things – *and packaging* – at the end of each product's useful life.
- Yes, there's a lot to do upstream, but for the moment, let's talk about end-of life.

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Sustainability has to mean…

- 100% recovery of the materials we use in products and packaging for reuse in the next generation of products and packaging.
- That rules out landfilling.
- And let's be honest: It also rules out incineration – even when some energy is recovered.

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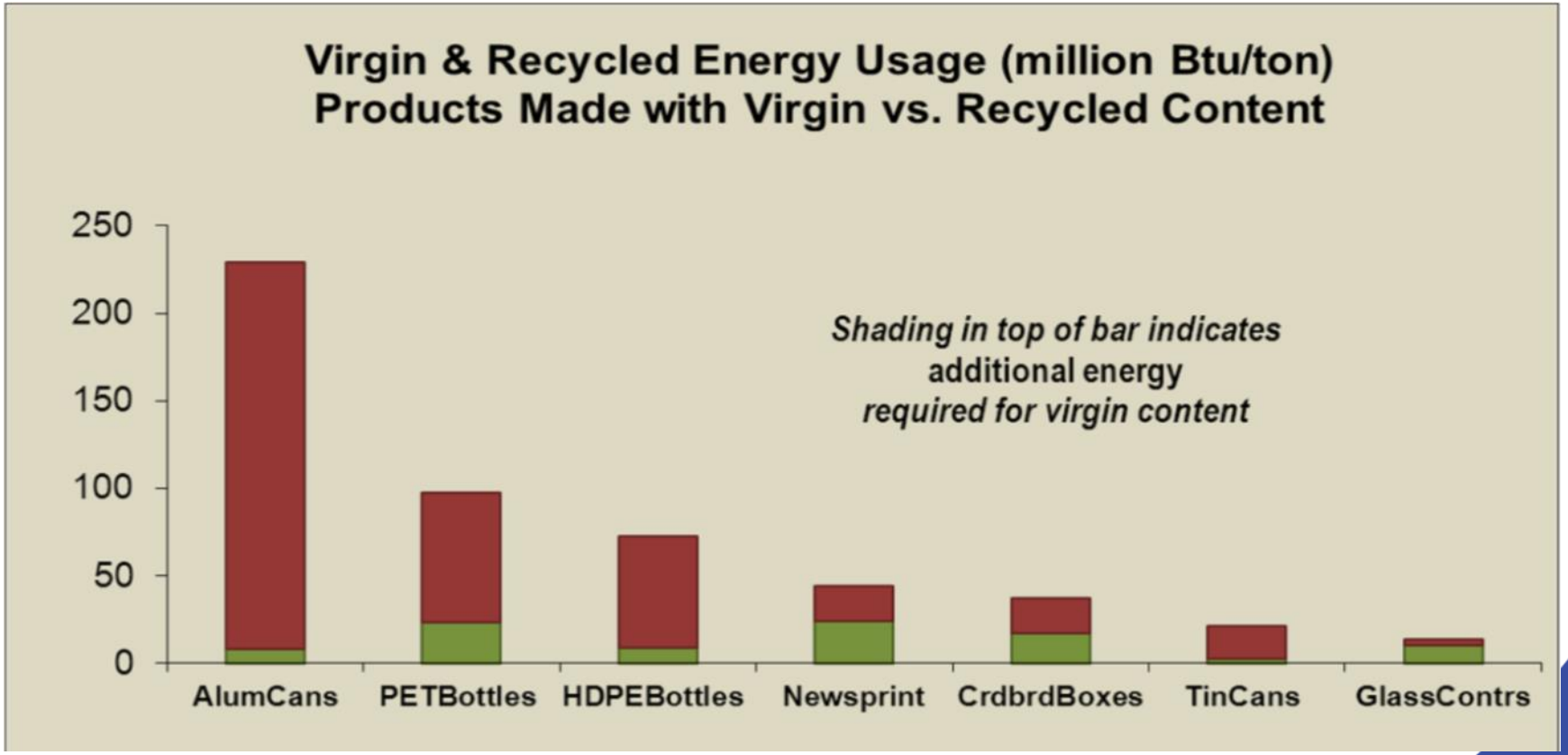
Energy savings from recycled feedstocks compared to virgin.



Jeff Morris, Sound Resource Management

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So, to avoid this, what do we do?

Our "Zero Waste" resolution focused on throw-aways.

- *"By mid-2008, SPU will conduct a comprehensive study of products, packages and ingredients that could be banned or otherwise discouraged…."*

- *"Initial products for review will include non-compostable plastic shopping bags and Styrofoam food containers."*

From Resolution 30990, the "Zero Waste Resolution," 2007

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Which focused us on food service packaging. No more of this:

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That looked like a good idea, but there was a fatal flaw.

Our study told us:

All the replacements for EPS food service ware were worse for the environment.

- Heavier – more costly to ship.
- Denser – used more material.
- Eternal – almost never break down in a landfill or anywhere else (though that also applies to EPS).

- And usually not recyclable – certainly not when contaminated with food – but neither is EPS.

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And what about those leftover soggy fries? The real problem looks something like this:

Is Zero Waste realistic?

What's in the waste from QSRs?

- ❑ Pre-packaging materials – some will be garbage, some recyclable plastics.
- ❑ Food prep waste – compostable.
- ❑ Food service ware and packaging – almost all can be composted.
- ❑ Packaging is the vehicle for capturing front-of-house leftover food.
- ❑ So the answer is yes (almost).

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So how big is the problem, really?

- In 2012, we shipped **3,571 tons** of non-compostable single-use food service products 250 miles by train to the landfill.
- **That packaging filled 128 shipping containers on 64 rail cars.**
- Assume that the leftover food collected with that single-use packaging was merely equal in weight to the plastic and paper…
- **Altogether, that's 256 shipping containers and 128 rail cars of waste per year just from Seattle QSRs.**

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To get the packaging out of the garbage:

- Seattle banned EPS food service ware effective January 1, 2009
- And, effective July 1, 2010 – 18 months later
- The City required ALL single-use food service packaging to be either:

Compostable, or

Recyclable.

- Compostable preferred.
- (Because food-contaminated service ware is not recyclable; it's garbage.)

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Recycling
Recycling
Food+ Compostables
Food+ Compostables
All of our fried items and shrimp cocktails are compostable
Cup Carriers
Paper Bags
Paper Entrée Boats
Napkins
Tea Bags
Garbage
Garbage
Drink Cups
Chowder Cups
Water Cups
Condiment Packages
Wrappers
Plastic Utensils
Straws


Compost
Place these kinds of items in this bin
NO PLASTIC
ZERO WASTE
Recycle
Place these kinds of items in this bin
ZERO WASTE
Trash
STOP!
Is that compost or recycle?
Or trash:
Place these kinds of items in this bin
ZERO WASTE


cleanScapes
Clean Event Station
Thank you for doing your part to keep this event, our City, and our world clean, green and beautiful.
Way to Throw!
Food Waste
COMPOST. FOOD FOR THE SOIL.
Recycling
IF YOU CAN'T REDUCE. RECYCLE.
Garbage
THINK BEYOND WASTE
95F09 01748
95B09 01102
95G09 02228


CAT

What made it work?

1. A strong regional composter.
   - ❑ Based on established residential Food and Yard Waste collection.
2. Product testing to prove compostability.
   - ❑ So restaurants know what they can use.
3. Outreach to increase commercial food waste collection for composting.
   - ❑ Synergy with front-of house compostables disposal in quick serve restaurants (QSRs).
4. Biopolymers. Thanks to industry, increasing availability of compostable service ware.
   - ❑ From 70 to more than 700 products now.

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What made it work?

- 5. Lots of outreach to restaurant and packaging industries.
  - Product fairs and workshops where new products were shown;
  - Stakeholder meetings that brought restaurants, manufacturers and distributors together;
  - Direct mail to Seattle food service businesses – including institutions.
  - Regular presence at restaurant industry trade shows;
  - Thousands of site visits – still!
  - And a few fines for EPS use.
- 6. Local curbside and commercial recycling systems that accept coated papers and nearly all plastics.

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We've had some success so far.

- Between 2008 and 2012, the amount of food-grade EPS in Seattle commercial garbage dropped from 516 tons/yr. to 174 tons.
- From Seattle Mariners stadium, 566 tons of food waste including 100+ tons of packaging was composted in 2013.
- Of an estimated 3,000 tons of food waste collected from QSRs, 1,000 tons is packaging.
- Before we started this program, all of those tons were landfilled.

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Contamination is a problem.

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Looking ahead to a solution.

- **All** "dine-in" single-use, throwaway food service ware and packaging to be compostable – middle of 2015.
- Food courts deemed "dine-in."
- **All** "take-out" or "doggy box" packaging will also be compostable.
- The exception will continue to be hot and cold beverage cups which may be recyclable.

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Two problems solved.

Universally compostable Quick-Serve food service packaging means:

- **No** single-use, throw-away paper or plastic service ware or packaging goes to the landfill.
- Compostable packaging serves as the vehicle to keep leftover food out of the landfill, reducing green house gases.
- Those 128 railcars disappear.

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Related, supportive policies.

- Seattle is considering banning all organic waste from garbage.
- Both residential and commercial.
- It would all be diverted to compost.
- This likely will push Seattle's overall recycling rate past 60%, our goal in 2015.
- (Single-family residential already tops 70%)

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Challenges we face together.

- Growing the compost industry.
- Expanding compostable packaging regulations to more U.S. cities – or states.
- Better product labeling. The customer has to know what to do with it.
- Convincing some in the packaging industry that recycling is not the answer; it doesn't capture the leftover food.

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Close to real sustainability.

- In our Quick-Serve Restaurant industry we've linked the single-use packaging and leftover food to the organic cycle of carbon neutrality.
- *It's sustainable. We can do the same things and produce the same things, the same products, over and over and over without drawing down the world's limited resources.*
- Caveat: There are upstream – sourcing – issues, and those are conversations you'll also have during this conference.

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