



Portland Speakers at Recycling Conference

April 28, 2021

The 2021 Northeast Recycling Council (NERC) Spring Conference offered two days of presentations on environmentally sustainable materials management, a topic not only something many people in the Pacific NW are interested in, but those across the US and the globe.

Presentations ranged from the easily understandable, to those on the consumer side of the equation, to those quite technical and more suited for ones working in the industry. Two of them included speakers from Portland.

Jules Bailey, Chief Stewardship Officer of the Oregon Beverage Recycling Cooperative (OBRC) was part of a panel entitled *Renewed Interest in Refillables*.

Bailey offered the perspective of Oregon's statewide program, BottleDrop. The five-cent bottle deposit that was started in 1971 was described as "aspirational and not prescriptive."

It wasn't until 40 years later (2011) that the BottleDrop Redemption Center was introduced. However, things have moved more quickly in recent years. In 2016, planning for a reusable bottle program was begun to compliment the recycling component, launching in 2018.

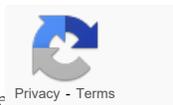
There are currently 12 participating breweries, cideries and wineries in the program which not only lowers the bottle cost for producers, but offers the environmental benefit of having a fraction of the carbon footprint of even recycled glass.

At present, bottles in the BottleDrop refillables program are only getting two or three "turns" (refills), but they are durable enough to get 25 or more.

Bailey addressed a common question on many people's minds: the sanitation process of refillable bottles. OBRC takes full responsibility and liability for the cleanliness of any bottle before filling, including post-wash inspection of all bottles and additional swab testing to ensure cleanliness.

Their bottle washing machines are equipped to easily handle foreign contaminants that may find their way into bottles like cigarette limes, and even syringes.

Looking ahead, Bailey said in order to increase participation in the program, the OBRC will have to overcome challenges like working with companies that have 25 percent or less out-of-state distribution (for a sufficient return and refill rate), providing clear labels standards and approved labels (so the cleaning process can remove them), and to address the recent shift in craft packaging to cans and away from



glass.

The *Recycling Markets Opportunities & Challenges* panel included Kim Holmes, Portland-based Owner & Principal Consultant of 4R Sustainability. She acknowledged that the recycling industry has had its ups and downs, but stressed that now is not the time to give up. Instead, now is the time to prepare for tomorrow's recycling.

Holmes identified the biggest issue: the economic sorting of materials into segregated commodity streams. At material recovery facilities (MRFs), mechanical and manual sorting of the contents of our blue recycling bins happens, however there has been a practical limit to what could be captured at the scale of most MRFs. While this is a challenge, the recognition of the limitations has led to the potential for a secondary sorting market.

“We know the material is out there. We need to make sure it gets into the hands of the people that can responsibly recycle it,” Holmes said.

Currently 80-90 percent of what is collected, post-sorting at MRFs, is effectively processed to meet industry specifications and get it to markets that need it. The remaining 10-20 percent, composed of mixed plastics, cartons and residue, is where things get complex, but where there is also opportunity.

Secondary sorting keeps valuable materials from going into landfills, reduces the amount of greenhouse gasses generated and reduces the amount of pollution to oceans. In keeping these materials domestically (as opposed to shipping them to other countries), there is the additional benefit of having good, regulated solid waste systems for the percentage of unrecyclable material.

Municipalities and residents benefit from “Blue Bin Accountability” and data generated encourages product stewardship and improves recycling rates as well as creates domestic clean technology jobs.

Holmes presented the Portland Summer 2019 report, available at pnwsort.org, a project managed by the Plastics Industry Association that received and sorted samples from four MRFs in OR and WA. The project used results from Los Angeles as a baseline against which to compare Portland to.

One of the big differences between the two cities was the amount of polypropylene that could be recovered and markets that can recycle them. Holmes feels this could be the next frontier for emerging and domestic markets.

Based on what the project was able to pull out during the 60-day duration, Holmes is hopeful there can be an expansion of what can be put into our blue rolling bins, including items like red Solo cups, beer can six-pack holders and cold cups like those used by Dutch Bros. and Starbucks.

Findings suggest an additional 50,000 tons per year of additional recyclable materials could be captured.

These two presentations were just a fraction of what the conference offered to attendees. The overall tone of the conference was encouraging to this recycling believer.

There may be hurdles to recycling certain products, but there are people working to overcome them and help our communities become more environmentally responsible.

More on the conference and NERC at nerc.org.

Post tags: [Jules Bailey](#), [Kim Holmes](#), [Northeast Recycling Council](#), [recycling](#)

[← Previous Post](#)

[Next Post →](#)

Leave a Comment

You must be [logged in](#) to post a comment.



LATEST DIGITAL EDITION

SE the SOUTHEAST EXAMINER
 Your Neighborhood News Source
 Created and Powered by the Love of Community
 May 2021
 Our 32nd Year Vol 12, No 5, Portland, OR

May 2021

History of Homelessness
 By Dan McGeerhan

Post-Pandemic Portland: Will SE Ever Be the Same?

[Download or View](#)

SUPPORT OUR ADVERTISERS

[Store to Door](#)



URBAN GLEANERS
FOOD FOR ALL

[Urban Gleaners](#)



PORTLAND
FRUIT TREE
PROJECT

[Portland Fruit Tree Project](#)

READER SURVEY

The Southeast Examiner wants to hear from you! We would like to hear your thoughts about the paper and our online presence. Visit [Our Online Survey Here](#).



[Home](#)

[About SE Examiner](#)

[Ad Sales](#)

[Street Stand Locations](#)

Find Us on Social Media

Copyright © 2021 The Southeast Examiner of Portland Oregon