



PHOTOS BY LENNY LIMJOCO

In just a couple of months, PUC Recycling Coordinator J.T. Rehbock collects 150 pounds worth of spent batteries in buckets like this one.

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said. "Little by little, it's sinking in to everyone that they have to recycle all the time, but it does need someone who keeps at it."

Rehbock has no outright refusniks on staff, he said. However, he regularly finds cardboard in the garbage bins and sometimes even paper. In recycling parlance, that's called contamination.

Staffers collect recyclables in their cubicles, then dump them into containers located on every floor, carefully labeled for mixed paper or plastic and cans. Even the garbage cans are labeled, as garbage, to avoid contamination by PUC employees and the public, who come here to pay water bills.

Plastic buckets are set out in kitchen areas to collect used small batteries. "I call Steve Lee at DPH when the buckets are full," Rehbock said. "In just a few months, we've collected 150 pounds of batteries." He also sends 10 spent toner cartridges a week back to manufacturers.

To complete DOE's annual questionnaire, Rehbock has to return at night to check the trash containers for material that should have been recycled.

"I survey them on three different nights, and I do see the waste stream diminishing," he said. "We used to have three huge rolling dumpsters, four cubic yards each, that were picked up three times a week. Now we're down to two, and the second isn't even full." Garbage pickup at 1155 Market costs \$20,000 a year.

Rehbock just completed the 2004 survey. He estimated that this PUC site recycled 4.5 tons of bottles and cans, 70 tons of paper and 7.8 tons of cardboard. The garbage dumpsters, he estimated, were contaminated with 20% cardboard and paper from his fellow workers and 10% bottles and cans from the privately owned café on the ground floor.

Fire Dept. saves \$80,000

IN 2003, the Department of Environment decided to test its assumption that full-scale composting and recycling could not only help the environment but could save the city a bundle. It needed a department that didn't share building space with other departments and whose staff consumed a lot of food.

Clang! San Francisco's 46 free-standing fire stations are filled with gourmands. And SFFD's garbage bill in 2002 was \$200,000 — perhaps a peanut-y percentage of its \$200 million budget, but still a nice hunk of dough.

"Environment staffers went to each station the night before its regular garbage pickup to see what was being thrown away," explained Gloria Chan, DOE's public information officer.

Using flashlights and gloves, they pawed through the garbage, and discovered that firefighters were already diverting about 30% of their throw-

aways by recycling.

"We also found that 75% of what was in the garbage could have been recycled or composted," Chan said.

DOE staff and reps of Norcal and the Oakland-based Applied Composting Consulting trained the firefighters, and, within four months, the stations had bumped up their composting and recycling diversion to 80%.

SFFD, the first U.S. fire department to participate in such a program, saved \$80,000 that year, Chan said.

"The program is still going strong after two years," said Assistant Deputy Chief Loren Kalos, whose SFFD division is in charge of firehouse maintenance. "There was resistance from some firefighters at first — it was a learning process, something new, maybe a little bit of a nuisance. But we made it mandatory, and I think everyone's come to realize it's just the right thing to do." ■

— MARJORIE BEGGS

City Hall's recycling rate: 66%

He'd be delighted to have composting in the building, he said, and bemoans the missed opportunity to collect food scraps from the cafe, but — more within his control — from office parties, which happen at least once a week.

\$150,000 SAVED IN 2003

Department of Environment's 2003 annual report had some good news: The city saved \$150,000 in garbage pickup costs that year. Also, City Hall, the government site with the most departments in one building, managed to get its diversion rate up to 66% by recycling paper, bottles, cans and cardboard.

Another plus was that 70% of the city's 49 departments sent in their annual surveys in 2003, 16 more than the previous year. Moreover, the number of department sites reporting rose from 55 in 2002 to 120 in 2003. Many departments have multiple sites — Rec and Park has 220 — and each is expected to collect detailed recycling data.

The survey asks each department's size; locations where waste is generated (conference room, lobby, cafeteria); the type of waste (mixed paper, food, wood, glass) and what's being recycled, reused, donated, composted; waste-prevention measures such as setting computer and printer defaults to double-sided (duplex) printing. Departments have to calculate the recycled volume only if they are in buildings by themselves, in which case they can get the information from their garbage and recycling haulers.

The annual report had bad news, too. Among the no-shows for the 2003 survey were some huge departments like Muni and the Port, as well as the Academy of Sciences, Adult Probation, Assessor/Recorder, Board of Appeals, Building Inspection, Child Support Services, City Planning, Emergency Communications, Municipal Transportation Agency, Public Defender, Public Finance and Business Affairs, and War Memorial and Performing Arts Center.

Chang works with 125 department recycling coordinators and additional contact people in large departments, trains them, fields their questions and consolidates the information they send to her so the city can monitor its progress.

There's no punishment for not complying, and some departments have been thumbing their noses at the reporting mandate for more than four years.

"It's an ongoing task to get everyone to comply," Chang concedes. "They say they don't have enough time or they don't have the resources to do it. It's clearly not a priority for some."

With the most recalcitrant departments, Chang says she uses a time-honored method: "Leverage — I try to get the Environment director (Jared Blumenfeld) involved in talking to the department."

The August 2004 supes resolution has one more way for DOE to slap the hands of departments: the city's whistle-blower complaint program. "Improper professional conduct," states the resolution, "includes the purchase of unneeded supplies or equipment, and the failure to reuse or recycle major resources or reduce waste generation."

Chang said that she's received two whistle-blower calls in the last year, one for a police station that was not doing any recycling, the other fingering a privately owned building leasing offices to city departments that didn't provide adequate recycling bins.

Environment's next annual report is due to the Board of Supervisors June 1.

WHAT'S GETTING RECYCLED

Though the Assessor/Recorder's Office hasn't filed a report, that doesn't mean its workers are tossing mixed paper willy-nilly in the garbage. There's just no report documenting the department's efforts.

"Most departments are recycling at least paper," Chang said, "but they don't necessarily have a committed staff person to fill out the report, [and] most could do a better job of reusing and recycling, but it takes upper-management support and innovative practices to make that happen."

So Environment's annual report works with the info it has from departments and from Norcal Waste Systems. Norcal is a private company with 32 subsidiaries in California, including Golden Gate Disposal, Sunset Scavenger, Recycle Central at Pier 96, and Vacaville composter Jepson Prairie Organics.

Of the 96,277 tons of city government waste that didn't go to landfill in 2003, the lion's share (75%) was 72,143 tons of debris from building construction and demolition and street and water line repairs, most collected by the Department of Public Works and then recycled or reused. DPW, for example, used 3,140 tons of concrete debris and reused 23,000 tons of sand to reinforce eroding bluffs at Ocean Beach.

City departments snatched another 16% (15,053 tons) away from the garbage collectors in the form of compostables — brush, grass, trees and food scraps.

"We get at least two truckloads of trimmings a day just from Rec and Park," said Robert Reed, Norcal director of corporate

communications. Jepson turns all of San Francisco's compostables into a rich organic fertilizer called Four Course that, Reed says, is in great demand by vineyards.

Residential customers in San Francisco get free compost pickup. City government, however, like all commercial operations, pays to get rid of compostables, though the cost is 25% less than for trash. The city gets no return on the compost Jepson makes.

Scrap metal — old metal desks, Muni rails, copper pipes and more — constitutes another 2%, or 2,198 tons, of what departments recycle. And office recyclables comprise the final 7% (6,883 tons; of that, 10% are bottles, cans and wood pallets, 90% is mixed paper and cardboard.

According to Mike Ward, assistant director of the Department of Administrative Services, the city has a \$4.5 million Office Depot contract, excluding paper, furniture and computers. And John Danaher, who handles the city's paper contracts with six vendors, said copier paper alone cost close to \$900,000 last year.

"We buy between 20,000 and 35,000 cases of copier paper a year," Danaher said, "and then there's the janitorial paper — we're averaging \$1.3 million a year for that." DOE requires all copier and bond paper to have at least 30% post-consumer recycled content.

A PERSONAL COMMITMENT

The Department on the Status of Women has seven staff members in a suite of three offices at 25 Van Ness. Acting Policy Analyst Bernice Casey is in her second year as recycling coordinator.

"Recycling's important to me personally," Casey said. "After two years, I'm noticing that everyone's paying more attention to it and doing it willingly." She only remembers having to "shame" a fellow staffer once.

"We haven't ordered paper clips or binder clips for two years — we reuse all of them," she said. "Because we have older copiers without duplexing capacity, we reuse the second side of all paper. We always ask ourselves, 'Do you really need to print that out?' And we avoid printing multiple copies whenever possible."

Department commissioners get packets of information in used binders or report covers, and with used tabs. Staff eat lunch off dishes and utensils brought from home to eliminate paper plates and plasticware.

"We have a container for aluminum and glass under the sink," Casey said. "When the janitors don't pick it up, Rosario Navarrette, our deputy director, takes it home with her."

DOE doesn't want to pit department against department, Chang said, but the annual report did give kudos to DPW as the city's top recycler, by volume. Of course, DPW also weighs in as the primo waste generator: All that concrete.

The top 10 waste generators after DPW are SFO, S.F. General Hospital, Rec and Park, Laguna Honda, Hall of Justice, Muni, Sheriff, Fire and Police. The list was created by calculating how much trash was hauled away from an entire department, such as Rec and Park in all its locations, or from a single city-owned building, such as the Hall of Justice.

Perhaps the biggest part of Chang's job is to turn wasters into environmental good guys. "I'm working with the Sheriff's Department to implement food composting at the Hall of Justice," she said, "so once that program begins, the Sheriff's Department will also be a top recycler/composter."

Chang also is working with the S.F. General and Laguna Honda's cafeterias to get composting going. Once in place, she estimates each can easily be composting 200 tons a year.

CHECKLIST OF RECYCLING PROBLEMS

All departments seem to have interesting stories about recycling. At Fox Plaza, 29 staff members of the Department of Children, Youth and Their Families work in a single suite that takes up half a floor.

"I got the recycling coordinator job four years ago by default," said Office Manager Anna Rainey. "But I've learned so much that now I do it because it interests me — I'm a converted recycler and a true stickler."

Environment has stepped up city department monitoring, she said, and she's all for it. In January, DOE gave recycling coordinators an official contamination notice to hand out to noncompliant or careless fellow employees.

The notice has a check list of "problems": "recyclable items were found in your trash such as paper bottles, cans, plastic containers"; "reusable items were found in your trash such as plastic bags, food packaging such as Styrofoam or paper cups."

Rainey likes the idea of the "report card." So far, she's only used it once, for a minor infraction, she said. "I get a little resistance from staff — when I sent out a notice about new bins, I found the notices in the recycling bin." That was a joke.

She's always looking for creative ways to recycle. Staffers use note pads made from their fax machines' one-sided confirmation/busy signal notices.

"We collect them in a special box," Rainey said, "and every few months I take them to the city's Reproduction Services at 875 Stevenson. They make them into about 20 pads for us."

Also in Fox Plaza is a unit of the city attorney's office with 200-plus employees. Office Administrator and Recycling Coordinator Mary Jane Winslow says everyone in her office seems willing to participate in recycling.

"We're educated San Franciscans," she said. But there's one standard recycling practice this office can't comply with. "Because of legal issues and confidentiality, we don't reuse the back sides of

paper."

Rick Koehler, assistant personnel manager in the Sheriff's Department, oversees recycling at 13 sites. To complete the annual survey takes a couple of days, he says, because he has to collect information from the seven officers at Laguna Honda, the five at the Youth Guidance Center, the 60 workers at the main office in City Hall and the other 10 sites.

Like other coordinators, he keeps his eye out for unusual opportunities: "We recently changed the officers' uniforms and had a lot of generic pants. We donated 700 or 800 pairs to a local charity."

EVEN BETTER THAN CITY HALL

How does the Department of the Environment's diversion rate measure up? It's the best.

"We divert 90% of our waste," Chang said. "We have four floors of cubicles. No one has a personal wastebasket. Every floor has one container for garbage, one for recycling and one for compost."

Staffers go through a special training when they come on board.

For events, caterers are asked to bring nothing that's "disposable": All containers and utensils should be able to be recycled, composted or reused. On display in the office is a plastic-looking container — the kind that a deli would put a pasta salad in, for example — that's made out of cornstarch and is both microwavable and reusable. When its day is finally done, it can be composted.

Environment uses 100% post-consumer recycled paper, and in the bathrooms, the paper towels and toilet-seat liners are a special compostable paper.

The 70 people working at DOE generate only two 74-gallon totes of garbage a week. Also, in a week they fill a 32-gallon compost tote and four 64-gallon recycling totes, one with bottles and cans and four with paper.

What about that 10% the department can't seem to divert? It's pesky things like plastic bags, plastic bottle caps and Styrofoam, Chang said. "There's always a little something."

Meantime, Environment continues to work to turn droppings into gold — at least the recycled, reused, composted equivalent of it. ■

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Nonprofits recycle 94% of city's e-waste

GOOD to recycle paper. Great to compost organic scraps. Wonderful to reuse construction materials. Now what about the ubiquitous electronic gear? The computers, monitors, keyboards on every desk, the fax machines and printers in every office? The cell phones, pagers, scanners, cables, drives?

"A computer in working condition that's too slow for a high-power user, such as an engineer, may be perfectly usable for an employee doing only word processing and small spreadsheet work," said Julia Chang, the Department of Environment's city government recycling coordinator. The same computer might also find a happy home at a nonprofit.

Chang says that 6% of city-purchased electronic equipment is reused by other S.F. government workers; the rest goes to Alameda County Computer Resource Center in Berkeley, Community Computer Center in San Francisco and Computer Recycling Center in Santa Rosa.

These nonprofits refurbish equipment, donate it to other nonprofits and recycle the unusable. The goal is to keep hazardous e-waste — the equipment contains mercury, arsenic, cadmium, barium, silver, selenium, chromium, lead — out of landfills.

"The nonprofits screen computers and parts for reuse," Chang said. "They strip, separate and deliver components to other recyclers downstream, who recycle the metal and circuit boards from cpu's, the glass and lead from monitors, the plastics from monitors, keyboards and mice."

Because government economics are tight, departments are holding on to computers longer these days so the reuse numbers have dropped.

Disposing of e-waste is a big problem that won't get smaller. "The nation's electronic waste is increasing by 3% to 5% a year, almost three times as fast as total municipal waste," according to a Neighborhood Environment Newswire article published in March. The source of that stat was the research and advocacy group Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition. ■

— MARJORIE BEGGS



Julia Chang examines some of the many recycling bins at DOE's offices.

Best buy for books is Book Bay at Main

BY PHIL TRACY

THE Friends of the Library's used bookstore, Book Bay at the Main, set just inside the Grove Street entrance of the Main Branch, celebrated its fourth anniversary in April. Last year, it sold 50,000 books, generating \$125,000 in profits that it turned back to the library to run underfunded programs.

Rarely displaying more than 3,000 books at a time, the 200-square-foot spot has one of the highest size-to-sales ratios of any used bookstore in the city. Out on Clement, Green Apple has 5,500 square feet and sells 187,000 books annually, or 34 books per square foot. By comparison, Book Bay at the Main is a powerhouse, selling 250 books per foot and leaving Green Apple in the dust.

"Part of the appeal is simply the small space," explains Coleman Conroy, Friends of the Library's director of communications. "People can be in and out in 10 minutes. For the sales it generates, you'd usually have a space three or four times as large, and it would take you a lot longer to go through it."

Then there's foot traffic. Library staffer Marcia Schneider estimates that 1,600 to 3,500 people pass through the Grove Street entrance daily, every one of them a confirmed book reader.

"I call it 'backward book-selling,'" says Rand Salvasser, Book Bay store manager. "People come to the library looking to check out a book, and if what they want isn't available, they decide to check us out."

What they find are used popular titles in remarkably good condition at very low prices — in other words, a book-buyer's dream.

"I recognize what I'm saying sounds self-serving," Salvasser confides, "but believe me, it's true."

He reaches up and, seemingly at random, picks out a copy of Patrick O'Brien's *Masters and Commanders*. It looks brand new. Turning the book over and reading the printed cover price, he says, "This book would cost you \$13.95 at Barnes & Noble." He opens the flyleaf and shows me the Book Bay price: \$4. "Most of our books average \$5, and unless you are looking for something specialized, you'll likely find something to take home with you."

I do some checking out of my own. In the mystery section, Patricia Cromwell's *Bloufly*, out in paper for about two years, costs \$3. John Le Carré's *The Tailor of Panama* can be had for \$2. Neither book's spine is cracked; new, each would cost \$7.99. Popular mystery writers Dick Francis, Janet Evanovich and Tony Hilleman all are represented with multiple titles.

In the literature section, a seemingly brand new paperback of Kate Atkinson's *Behind the Scenes at the Museum* has a cover price of \$14. For three months I've been searching for this book in the library stacks. It's marked at \$4. I snatch it up.

All of the bookstore's merchandise is donated. Each year, 5,000 to 6,000 people give Friends of the Library about 500,000 books, which are sold at Book Bay and at a second, larger store at Fort Mason's Bldg. A. The two stores sell only donated books, not library castoffs. Library books that have exceeded their "discard by" date are sent off to community groups or overseas to developing countries.

Not every book donated to the library winds up on the shelves of the Main Branch store or the one in Fort Mason, which normally displays around 10,000 books at a time.

Books with more specialized subject matter or in less pristine condition are put aside for the library's annual big sale at the Fort Mason Pavilion. This year's is slated for Sept. 7 — 11.

Friends of the Library sold more than 200,000 books at last year's sale and brought in \$240,000. This added to the two stores' sales, plus other special Friends' sales, totaled close to a million dollars, Conroy estimates, and netted \$750,000 to support library programs.

The stores are staffed by some of the Friends' 3,000 volunteers. In existence under different names for more than 40 years, the nonprofit Friends has an operating budget of \$3.3 million and a staff of 24 to supplement the work of the volunteers, who do much of the heavy lifting associated with such a big operation. The Friends and their stores are a model for other libraries in California and throughout the country. ■



LENNY LIMJOCO

Manager Rand Salvasser: "I called it 'backward book-selling.'"