
Happy Holidays

Meg, Margherita and Lesley

*“Use it up, wear it out, make it do, or do without.”
-New England proverb*

December is the holiday season, when our minds turn to gifts, good eating and spending time with our families and loved ones. Who can ignore the twinkling lights, the holiday decorations and Christmas carols surrounding us as we walk through the city or shop at our local grocery store? With the holidays and our tendency for holiday excess on our minds, we are dedicating this edition of the Narragansett Bay Journal to trash and how it affects our lives and our Bay.

We all know that we live in a very wasteful society. According to the U.S. EPA, in 2009, each American generated an average 4.34 pounds of waste per day. This added up to about 243 million tons of trash for the country for the year with only about a third (34 percent) of the trash recycled. Containers and packaging make up the largest percentage of the waste (30 percent). The other categories were nondurable goods (22 percent, mostly paper and textiles), durable goods (19 percent), food scraps (14 percent) and yard trimmings (14 percent). The good news is that although we are generating more and more trash, recycling rates are increasing from less than 10 percent of the municipal solid waste generated in 1980 to almost 34 percent in 2009.

Rhode Island's trash is disposed of at the Central Landfill in Johnston which is managed by the Rhode Island Resource Recovery Corporation. On average, about 80 percent of the state's municipal solid waste is landfilled. But space at the Central Landfill is limited and it could reach its full capacity within twenty years.

We all discard our trash and it is hauled away. It is out of our sight, so it is not on our minds. But this fall, trash was very much on the minds (and in the noses!) of Rhode Islanders living in Johnston or surrounding communities near the state's landfill. Since early November, the landfill's foul odor made statewide news, reminding us that trash disposal is a messy business. We all share responsibility for the things we buy, use and discard. What we throw away fills up our landfill. And we all know that our cavalier attitude towards trash leaves us with unsightly roads and messy beaches and too often our trash washes into the water, flowing down the Bay and into the Atlantic Ocean where it contributes to a trash problem of global proportions.

With help from state agencies, advocates and dedicated legislators, Rhode Island is making progress addressing trash issues. In this edition of the Journal you can read about single stream recycling and producer responsibility laws that will help extend the life of the landfill, while reducing toxic chemicals released to our land, water and air.

Reduce, recycle and reuse. And Happy Holidays to all!!

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