

THE PROBLEM OF RECYCLING IN ONE SMALL TOWN IN MAINE: FOLLOW-UP

Senator Brenner, Representative Tucker and distinguished members of the Committee on Environment and Natural Resources. My name is John Fusco and I am the manager of the Ogunquit Transfer Station. I am writing in support of LD 1541: An Act to Support and Improve Municipal Recycling Programs and Save Taxpayer Money.

What has changed here in Ogunquit since I submitted my observations to the Natural Resource Commission last April? Most obviously we see less recycling. In a community that continues to want to recycle, we hear residents telling us that it is discouraging to know that less and less of their waste can be recovered and that recycling has become too confusing. We believe that one-on-one interaction with people gives us the best chance of helping lessen the confusion and our attendants monitor the recycling area very closely, but we are still seeing people struggle to separate what can be recycled and put it in the proper container regardless of signage and instruction and many people who were recycling no longer do so.

On the operations level in addition to Mixed Paper, we can not find any place that will recycle glass and we are being charged to recycle 40 yard containers of #1 PET and #2 HDPE plastics that are thoroughly sorted and we were also being charged for OCC. This is despite the help finding outlets that we receive through membership with the Maine Resource and Recycling Association.

We are now in the process of going to Pay As You Throw to try and recover some of these increasing costs – and this has increased the level of frustration on all sides because at the same time we also have to tell them to throw more of what was recycling into the trash. Our current contract with Casella/Pine Tree Waste will end in 2021 and if nothing changes we must realistically expect a dramatic increase in the cost of waste disposal seen in neighboring towns. I have heard the waste stream described as circular along which the waste flows. Each of the sections of that circle, Manufacturers - Consumer/Buyer - Consumers/Recyclers - Transfer Stations/Curbside Hauler Programs – MRF's [and back to Manufacturer] are interconnected. Only at the manufacturing section do we not see that this breakdown in recycling is increasing costs. [*Coca –Cola; post consumer plastic content 9% .Total plastic packaging produced annually: 3 million metric tons / Pepsico: 3% and 2.3 million metric tons / Nestle: 2% and 1.7 million metric tons / Unilever: less than 1% and 700,000 metric tons*.*]

Wasteful packaging increases entropy and cost at each of those other stages. I cannot forget hearing at a conference the speaker from one of those corporations above expounding on how soon all their packaging would be recyclable, but when I explained to him how people trying to recycle at the transfer station struggle just to read those small numbers he dismissed it saying that the sorting machines can distinguish the types of plastics – and then heard another

speaker, the CEO of a large MRF, after showing us pictures of enormous piles of bales of recycling complain that they can find no outlet for them. The MRF's are trying to manage the huge amounts of it and pass the increased cost down. The towns need to budget to manage this material. The consumer cannot avoid the packaging or pass the costs down and unless something changes we can only expect increasing levels of frustration and waste from those who we know would much rather be recycling and reducing that waste. From my perspective

LD 1541 seems to be a sensible way to remind manufacturers that even if their products are recyclable it costs money to recycle them and if they are not recyclable they need to reduce those amounts and should help pay to get rid of it.

* From Resource Recycling December 2019, page 17;" How much recycled plastic are big brands using? Report sheds light" by Jared Paben (based on a progress report by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation