

February 1, 2006

Robin Cargel
4625 Earl Gros Avenue, Apt #2
Baton Rouge, LA 70820

Dear Ms. Cargel:

Thank you for your letter on December 15th, 2005, sent to Administrator Stephen Johnson regarding recycling. The Administrator has forwarded your letter to the Office of Solid Waste (OSW) for a response.

I would like to commend you for your efforts to recycle and your work in encouraging those around you to do the same. As part of its effort, EPA has set a national goal of recycling 35% of municipal solid waste by 2008. Achieving this goal would result in increasing resource and energy conservation, increasing the protection of wildlife habitat, reducing the use of toxic chemicals, reducing the emissions of greenhouse gases and air pollutants, reducing water pollution, and reducing the need for landfills and incinerators. It is important for everyone to continue recycling so we can reach the national 35% goal and achieve these benefits. In 2003, the nation's average recycling rate by weight was 30.6%. Based on this recycling rate (72.3 million tons of material), over 50.8 million metric tons of carbon was prevented from being emitted into the atmosphere. This is equivalent to the annual emissions from 40.3 million cars. The energy benefits are 1.48 quadrillion BTUs, equivalent to 11.9 billion gallons of gasoline. The study on which these estimates are based is available at <http://www.epa.gov/wastewise/climate/tools.htm>

Most of the material that is put in a recycling bin ends up on the market for reuse and recycling. Some of this material is thrown away, because the materials collected may include contaminated paper (like food-stained pizza boxes), certain plastic containers that are difficult to recycle (like yogurt cups and butter tubs), and broken glass in pieces too small to be worth sorting by color (or "mixed glass cullet").

According to your city's recycling information listed on Earth 911 web site, in Baton Rouge, the residual rate is 5%, which means that 95% of the items that you and your neighbors put in your bins will get recycled. Contamination raises this rate, decreases the value and quality of the materials, and may interfere with the recycling process; therefore, it is important that only items accepted by your local program be put in the recycling bins. You can get more details about the curbside recycling program in Baton Rouge, by contacting them at 225-389-5194 or by

going to the earth 911 website <http://louisiana.earth911.org/usa/master.asp>.

In many areas, there is a great market demand for recyclable aluminum, paper, plastic, steel, and glass. The best way to support this industry is to buy products that are packaged in or made from recycled materials, and items that can be recycled again. All steel cans, and most aluminum cans, glass jars, paperboard (cereal boxes), and molded pulp (egg cartons) containers contain recycled materials. There are also many household items (carpet), office products (paper, folders), construction materials (floor and ceiling tiles, insulation), paper products, clothing, and many other objects that are made from recycled materials. Success stories involving recycled materials can be seen on these web links: (plastics), <http://www.vinylbydesign.com/site/PVC#PVC>, <http://www.epa.gov/epaoswer/non-hw/green/projects/agriplas.htm>, (newspaper) <http://www.naa.org/ppolicy/recycle/>. Information on the value of recycled commodities can be viewed at The Recycler's exchange website <http://www.recycle.net/Metal-N/Aluminum/>

“The U.S. Recycling Economic Information (REI) Study” is a study on the economic and environmental benefits of recycling conducted by the National Recycling Coalition. It utilized the best data available from 1997-1999, and demonstrated that recycling is a viable industry and identified potential business opportunities in the market. The results of this report are available at <http://www.epa.gov/jtr/econ/rei-rw/rei-rw.htm>. Another organization, Businesses and Environmentalists Allied for Recycling (BEAR), wrote a report that documents the costs and benefits of various recovery programs, with the goal of identifying innovative strategies to increase beverage container recycling. This can be seen at their website <http://www.globalgreen.org/bear/Projects/>.

I have enclosed some additional information that you may find helpful. You also may be interested in a four-part radio series produced by ABC and the BBC that investigates the potential of a world without waste. This can be heard online at <http://www.abc.net.au/rn/features/worldwaste/default.htm>. Please visit our website <http://www.epa.gov/osw/>, or contact Melanie Tymes in the Office of Solid Waste at (703)305-0178 or at tymes.melanie@epa.gov if you have other questions.

Recycling and waste prevention remain essential parts of our overall strategy to manage municipal solid waste in this country, and we continue to encourage all citizens to participate in recycling programs. Thank you for sharing how important recycling is to you; I certainly share your concern for protecting our environment.

Sincerely yours,

Matt Hale, Director
Office of Solid Waste