

Ms. Anna K. Maddela
329 Livingston Avenue
Lyndhurst, New Jersey 07071

Dear Ms. Maddela:

Thank you for your letter of May 20, 2002 to Administrator Whitman concerning mandatory recycling laws. She forwarded your letter to the Office of Solid Waste for a response. I would like to share some information about what the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is doing to reduce waste and increase recycling in America.

First, let me point out that the management of municipal solid waste in this country is primarily the responsibility of state and local authorities. Currently, our national laws do not allow EPA to establish federal regulations on recycling. EPA publishes information, provides technical support, and develops voluntary programs to encourage recycling (and waste reduction). We rely on the state and local governments to regulate municipal solid waste.

The materials collected for recycling in any given collection program are determined by the markets that exist for the materials. That's why some communities may collect plastics, or certain plastic resins if they have markets for those materials, and others do not. EPA's efforts focus on helping develop new markets or expand existing markets for all recovered materials. We do this by working cooperatively with states, communities, businesses, industries, and non-profit organizations. Our initiatives have included a national grant program to create jobs through recycling, providing technical assistance to states, local communities, and businesses on recycling program development, and providing research to demonstrate the environmental, economic, and social benefits of recycling. We have also developed information for school-aged children and lesson plans for teachers on recycling and waste prevention.

We have also worked with industry trade associations such as the American Forest and Paper Association (AF&PA), the Newspaper Association of America (NAA), the Steel Recycling Institute (SRI), and the Institute of Scrap Recycling Industries (ISRI) on initiatives to encourage

increased and more efficient use of recovered materials. We are a major sponsor of "America Recycles Day," an annual event conducted nationwide with industry and environmental groups to promote recycling. Through our partnerships with these organizations, we have been able to provide information and technical support to influence recycling on a national level.

For recycling to succeed, it is important that consumers, including government, businesses, and individuals, buy and use products made from recycled materials. EPA supports a number of activities to encourage private sector businesses and local governments to purchase products containing recycled material. EPA has funded the U.S. Conference of Mayors' "Buy Recycled" project and the National Recycling Coalition's "Buy Recycled Business Alliance." A few years ago we launched the "WasteWise" program which challenges the nation's businesses and non-governmental organizations to reduce and recycle waste and to buy recycled products. We also write guidelines for Federal agencies that require them to buy products made from recycled materials.

Recycling remains an essential part of waste management in this country. Since 1989 the number of curbside recycling programs has risen from 1,100 to more than 9,300. Today, over 100 million people, 40 percent of the U.S. population, are served by curbside recycling programs. During this same time period, our national recycling rate has risen from about 6 percent to 30 percent. To continue this trend, all sectors of society must be involved in recycling - governments, citizens, and businesses. Industry has invested billions of dollars to make structural changes to accommodate the use of recovered materials in their manufacturing processes, which will result in long-term changes in the types of raw materials used in manufacturing.

You may want to visit the EPA Student Center website at <http://www.epa.gov/students/>. This website is an excellent resource for middle and high school students to explore a wide range of environmental issues including recycling. Additional information and documents are available from our website at <http://www.epa.gov/epaoswer/non-hw/muncpl/>.

I appreciate about your interest in the environment, particularly recycling and waste reduction.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth A. Cotsworth, Director
Office of Solid Waste

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