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“What plastic bag?”

The Isabella County Recycling Center’s last Household Hazardous waste, Electronic Waste, and Clean Sweep pesticide collection on Wednesday, June 27th was a great success! Several businesses supported our efforts. Our volunteers greeted 55 cars, and 8,197 pounds of HHW and pesticides were removed from our environment. During our 3 collections so far this year, a whopping 21,807 pounds of HHW and pesticides have been brought in by residents! Thanks to all who attended.

Volunteers were greeted in the morning with donuts from Robaire’s Bakery. Everyone enjoyed pizza and breadsticks at lunch donated by Pisanello’s Pizza of Mt. Pleasant. Millbrook Water kept us hydrated with a generous donation of bottled water. We send out our thanks to all who participated. Our next collection will be Tuesday, August 14th from 9 AM to 1 PM. There will only be three more collections for the rest of the year, so clean out those garages, workshops, basements, attics, and potting sheds, and make your appointment today! Appointments are required, so please call Desiree at 989-773-9631 to make yours today. Volunteers are needed to greet and sign people in. Please let me know if you would like to volunteer.

On another note, I have recently been doing some research regarding reusable shopping bags. During my internship (here at the Recycling Center, of course,) I contacted the major retailers in Isabella County. According to my calculations (in 2004, so I’m sure it’s much worse now,) in Isabella County alone, we use four million plastic shopping bags per year. Let me give you a few statistics about plastic shopping bags. The petroleum used to make 14 plastic bags could drive a car 1 mile. Americans use 380 billion plastic bags a year. An estimated 100,000 marine animals are killed annual by plastic bags. In some parts of the ocean there are 6 pounds of plastic for every pound of plankton. Paper bags aren’t much better. It takes 70% more global warming gases to make a paper bag instead of a plastic one. Paper bags do not biodegrade in landfills. These facts are disturbing, and all the more reason to purchase reusable cotton or polypropylene bags. We found one reusable bag at Greentree Grocery, as well as Kroger in Mt Pleasant. Although I’m sure many retailers in the area also have options. I think it just makes sense, especially considering the staggering and disturbing statistics mentioned earlier. The bag from Greentree had a web site listed on it, www.1bagatime.com.

I emailed the company’s owner, Lisa Foster, with questions. She responded quickly and was very nice. Lisa informed me that paper bags also produce 50 times more water pollution, use 4 times more energy than making a plastic bag, and 80% of them end up in landfills although they are highly recyclable. When I shop, if I forget my canvas totes I ask for paper bags. Now I will think again. I’m going to start keeping my totes in the car, and if necessary, run out to my car if I forget them. Lisa Foster said something about bags that I found very interesting and philosophical: “Again, the disposable paper bag, like the disposable plastic bag, is a heavy user of resources for a one time convenience. We, as a society, have to consider how long we can afford such luxuries and how long we are willing to degrade our environment for such a small convenience.” Well stated. If you ask me, one-time use bags should be outlawed. Some countries in Europe, Ireland in particular, have levied a 15¢ tax on each disposable bag. Other countries have banned bags, and now cities in the U.S. are banning them as well. San Francisco has banned plastic bags and Los Angeles and Boston are considering similar measures. Although something of this nature is probably a long way off for Isabella County residents, we can choose to discontinue the use of disposable shopping bags individually. I’m on board!

My car is a V-8, by the way. Sigh. When I bought it back in 1998, when the gas prices were much more reasonable than they are now, I thought it would impress my real estate clients. I guess I’ve always been into recycling, since I also promote “reuse” of homes. I wonder if a local dealership would donate a hybrid for me to promote for them. I can only hope. In the meantime, Happy (REUSING and) Recycling!

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