

## Recycling in Otsego County: trash or not?

Earlier this year, as the special projects manager for the Otsego County Conservation Association, I followed the route of recyclables from the MOSA Southern Transfer Station, or STS, to Bert Adams Recycling in Binghamton. As a follow-up, I wanted to fill in the rest of the trip \_ from homeowner to the STS. The premise of both articles is to dispel the common belief that Otsego County recyclables are not really recycled but disposed of as trash.

I spoke with Russ Smith of Russ Smith Hauling in Cooperstown about this problem. He said he properly disposes of recyclables. I made arrangements to ride with Barbie Smith to see what may be causing this confusion about proper disposal of recyclables. I picked one of the hotter days this summer, 90 degrees and pretty humid, to ride with Barbie in the red-and-white garbage truck.

The heart of the matter in getting recyclables picked up properly is paying attention to the schedule. For Smith's customers, the day your recyclables are picked up is determined by the day your garbage is picked up.

So if your garbage is picked up on Monday, the first Thursday of the month is your recycling day. If your garbage is picked up on Tuesday, your recycling day is the second Thursday. And so on. If you follow this schedule, Barbie will use a white box truck to pick up recyclables, which are taken to MOSA's Northern Transfer Station in Fly Creek, to be sorted into the roll-off containers.

Businesses that use Russ Smith's services have their cardboard picked up on Wednesday in a garbage truck. And, yes, a garbage truck is correct, and this could be a reason why people think recyclables are treated as garbage when they are not.

Smith uses a garbage truck because cardboard can be compacted without reducing its ability to be recycled, and the run to the STS in Oneonta is that much more efficient, since compaction maximizes the delivery amount. The garbage truck is also used because it can dump the load of cardboard on the ground.

Cardboard is reloaded into the roll-off container for its trip to Binghamton and Bert Adams Recycling. When the planned retrofitting of the STS is complete, Smith's garbage truck will dump directly into the roll-off container.

The ride with Barbie was uneventful for the first hour. Garbage cans full of garbage, in clear or black plastic bags (most in garbage cans), were dragged over to the dump truck, and muscled over the back of the dumping area. Garbage cans must be lifted up high enough for the garbage to fall out. Then garbage cans and lids are returned to customers' property.

But all of this changes if a customer puts out recyclables on the wrong day. Since this was not a Thursday, it was garbage day, not recycling day. An hour into the run, we pulled up next to a trash can full of garbage with a clear plastic bag of recyclables next to it. There was also a stack of tied-up newspapers.

What was Barbie to do? We were using a garbage truck and therefore had no other place to put recyclables \_ except under my feet. So that's what we did. And if I hadn't been riding along, there would have been that much more room for recyclables left out on the wrong day. But what if the extra space is full? Does she throw recyclables in with the garbage or leave them at the curb until the correct day, disappointing her customer?

Vet's Sanitation uses a similar practice. They pick up recyclables with a garbage truck. One category goes in the compaction area and the other recyclable category goes in a cage on the truck behind the cab. This is why the schedule is so important for haulers.

I only lasted two hours riding with Barbie. Climbing in and out of a garbage truck was worse than any workout I have done at the Clark Sports Center. The floor of the truck is at least 36 inches off the ground,

and the steps are tucked underneath and in front of the wheel \_ not really convenient for stepping, so I had to jump down.

Needless to say, after two hours of hauling myself into the truck and jumping out, I was very tired, on the verge of a crash landing! So I thanked Barbie and, told her how impressed I was at her strength, endurance and good service to her customers.

The most important lesson I took from the experience is that recyclables must be put out on recycling day. And if you see something that looks like recyclables being dumped, stop and ask \_ you may be surprised.

Tips for recycling and making your hauler's job easier:

Check the schedule and put recyclables out on the correct day.

Recyclables should be clean and dry and in clear plastic bags.

Keep the weight of bags, garbage or recyclables, under 50 pounds. If it's too heavy for you, it's probably too heavy for the hauler.

Label containers that you don't want thrown away or recycled.

Remember \_ it's less expensive to recycle than to throw it away. Check the Otsego County Solid Waste Department website at [www.otsegocounty.com](http://www.otsegocounty.com) for description of recyclables.

The OCCA encourages everyone to shop locally, purchase wisely, conserve when you can and recycle all items possible. Reducing waste saves money, reduces pollution and conserves resources.

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