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CONTACT: Clare Innes
872-8100 ext. 207
cinnes@cswd.net

April 1 marks 15-year turning point for recycling in Chittenden County

April 1 marks the 15th anniversary of a giant leap forward for recycling in the Chittenden Solid Waste District (CSWD). ***In the 15 years since recycling became mandatory in Chittenden County on April 1, 1993, more than a billion pounds of recyclables have been collected.***

Fifteen years ago:

- The first “commingled” Materials Recovery Facility (MRF) in the state opened in Williston, accepting two streams of recyclables: Into one container went glass, metals, and plastics. Into another went mixed paper. Five years ago, the MRF went to a single-stream process, enabling businesses and residents to mix glass, metals, plastics, and paper all in the same container.
- Three CSWD Drop-Off Centers (DOCs) came online (bringing the total then to four), providing convenient facilities for residents and businesses to dispose of trash and recyclables and visit with their neighbors. Now there are seven DOCs in Chittenden County.
- Curbside recycling pick-up became available for every business and resident in Chittenden County.
- CSWD began providing businesses, institutions, and households the familiar blue recycling bins. Since 1993, 140,000 of the bins have been distributed.

Prior to these advances, it was difficult to recycle in Chittenden County. Recycling depots existed in only a few towns and accepted a narrow range of materials, and few haulers offered curbside recycling. Nowadays, CSWD offers seven Drop-Off Centers in Chittenden County and haulers are required to provide recycling services. Studies show that convenience is a huge factor in determining how willing people are to recycle.

Making it illegal to throw recyclables in the landfill also has been shown to step up participation. “When we went to mandatory recycling, we received a significant jump in calls on our Hotline,” recalls CSWD Waste Reduction Manager Nancy Plunkett. “Some people related that they hadn’t been recycling up to that point, even though they knew it was the right thing to do. Having it become mandatory provided the nudge they needed.”

Businesses and residents in Chittenden County may be fined up to \$500 for not recycling. Katie Rosa, who was hired as CSWD’s current Enforcement Officer in July, 2007, has not yet had to resort to imposing a fine and offers tools and information on recycling to those who need help setting up or improving their recycling systems. “We prefer to work with businesses and residents who aren’t recycling, to help them get it right,” she notes. “As long as they can show that they are striving to comply with the recycling regulations, we’ll do everything we can to help them set up a system that works for their situation.”

Other recycling programs CSWD offers include hazardous waste, scrap metal, clothing and textiles, batteries, compact fluorescent light bulbs, books, tires, appliances, electronics, and more.

For more information on CSWD, please visit our website at www.cswd.net or call 872-8111.

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