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Recycling program steps up FIRST IMPRESSIONS

January 15, 2008 12:35 am

by Hugh Muir
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The combined Stafford-Fredericksburg Regional Landfill has achieved an E-3 rating from the Virginia Environmental Excellence program, making it one of four landfills in the state at one step from the top rating.



This has been the result, analyst Julie May told a meeting of the Rappahannock Sierra Club on Thursday, of continued improvement of its recycling program and the development of such projects as the First Impressions Program to clean up and beautify the areas major highways.

The Rappahannock Regional Solid Waste Management Board, the Stafford-Fredericksburg agency known as the R-Board, has recycled 40 percent of its waste products since 2006, May said, topping the state average of 38 percent. This has resulted in considerable savings, May said, pointing out that it costs \$28 to landfill a ton of waste and \$5.40 to recycle a ton of waste.

The R-Board, while supervised by two governments since the city closed its own landfill in 1987, is run as a private company. "It costs the taxpayers nothing," May said. The regional landfill makes money in part from charging \$39 a ton for delivered waste, and also by selling much of its recyclable material, principally paper and metal.

The R-Board also has set special recycling days for profitable items. This month, on Jan. 24 and 25 from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Jan. 26 from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., residents are invited to drop off their old electronic devices at the Eskimo Hill Road landfill. (Proof of residency must be shown.) Those that are still working are auctioned off by the landfill.

In April, the landfill will hold its second annual Shredding Day, for residents who want to safely dispose of records and other material they don't want to fall into ID-stealing hands. "Last year it was so successful, we were overwhelmed," May said. "We hope to be better prepared this time." In addition to newsprint, there is a market for recycled paper of any kind, she said. "We accept stapled paper as well."

The R-Board operation also accepts fluorescent bulbs, used batteries and--unlike some other landfills--plastics of virtually any category. "Most areas take only Nos. 1 and 2 plastics," May said. "We accept all the numbers, 1 through 7."



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For some things there is no market, May said. Rubber tires, for example, and Styrofoam. "It's so light," she said of the latter, "that very little weight still requires a lot of volume, not financially feasible." What makes something recyclable? "There has to be a market for it," May said.

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The George Washington Regional Commission established its First Impressions Program in September and hired Laurel Hemmig as the assistant regional planner to coordinate it.

Its announced goal is to combat littering and to encourage the provision of sustainable landscaping, with cost-effective irrigation, for public spaces that include highway shoulders and medians, as well as commercial developments and lands owned by state and local governments.

"First Impressions are just that," Hemmig said, "the highways that visitors see when they first come to our area."

Hemmig, a 2006 University of Mary Washington graduate, is working to expand the effort. Her present on-the-ground work force is made up of nonviolent probationers who form the litter patrol along the First Impressions corridors. These include Interstate 95, U.S. 1, U.S. 17 and State Route 3.

Some 37 probationers, who all live in the area, have been on the job for three months. They are assigned by the Rappahannock Regional Jail and are not supervised. All have attended a brief class on highway safety and cleanup procedures. They wear safety vests and the results of their work can be spotted by the orange bags they use to stow the litter. State-run cleanups, performed by supervised jail inmates, use blue bags.

There is a slow buildup of the First Impressions force by five to 10 probationers a month, Hemmig said, but there is some attrition as well. She hopes, eventually, for as many as 50. They are not paid and, collectively, have put in about 77 hours over the past three months. "That has saved the taxpayers, at the minimum wage rate, some \$500," she said.

At UMW Hemmig was a historic-preservation and geography major. After working briefly in the commercial field, she applied for her current job after seeing it listed on the Internet. "I've always wanted to work in the planning field," she said.

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