

# Tenderloin near bottom of recycling in city

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call 'source separation' — that means glass, metal and plastic containers still have to be separated from paper instead of being 'single stream,' all in one."

It has to do with older trucks servicing some routes. "But it's still really easy to recycle, even with two blue carts," Levaggi said. "Just check with your collector."

TNDC has been doing full-scale recycling and composting at its Civic Center Residence for the last six months. The 202-unit SRO at 44 McAllister is the largest of TNDC's 22 buildings, said Hilmon Sorey, TNDC director of property management.

"It's sort of a trial balloon," he said. "We chose the Civic Center because of its size and because it has more maintenance staff. Also, it didn't have existing trash chutes so we didn't have to change any infrastructure for the carts."

Twice a week, the building residents generate enough material to fill three compost carts, two recycling carts for glass, metal and plastic bottles, and one large dumpster of paper and cardboard.

"We've gone from 12 cans of garbage twice weekly to seven," Sorey said. "It's probably fair to say we've reduced costs by 30%."

At TNDC's other buildings, only two have modest recycling: the 88-unit Ritz Hotel at 216 Eddy, which has cardboard and compost pickups, and the 105-unit Franciscan Towers, which recycles paper and cardboard only.

"There's no question that we'll get more of our properties into the program soon," Sorey said.

Unfortunately, compost pickups at SROs and apartment buildings are extremely rare throughout the city, Chan said. "With so many people contributing [to the green cart], the potential for contamination is high." Too many no-no's in the green cart results in impure compost.

## BUSINESSES CAN SAVE MONEY

There are financial incentives for businesses to recycle or compost. A restaurant or market that uses the green compost cart for leftover or unusable food can get 25% off the cost of that cart. Golden Gate's outreach literature says it will provide staff with free, multilingual training in proper sorting. The Environment Department says that 1,700 businesses citywide have signed up for compostable collection.

Levaggi rattled off a list of Tenderloin businesses already composting. The star is the Culinary Institute on Turk and Polk, which puts out 45 to 50 green carts six days a week. Project Open Hand at 730 Polk comes in second. Tenderloin Community School at 637 Turk has a food waste program that's part of its curriculum.

Smaller operations that compost include Bambuddha Lounge in the Phoenix Hotel at 601 Eddy, Sai Jai Thai at 771 O'Farrell, Wild Awakenings coffee shop at 142 McAllister, and Them-Ky restaurant at 717 Ellis.

Recycling, too, can save businesses money. If an office or bar can separate out enough recyclables, which are picked up for free, it may be able to reduce the amount of garbage that needs hauling and, thus, its collection charges.

Faithful Fools Copy Shop has been recycling for years, one blue cart a week, "which is always jammed full," said manager Richard Nichols.

Elaine Zamora opened her law offices at 118 Jones three years ago, but despite generating reams of paper, she'd never recycled because she was uncertain if the business was eligible for curbside pickup.

"I would just take paper home with me and recycle it there," she told The Extra. When we suggested she contact Golden Gate Disposal, she had her office manager, Reyna Valencia, put in a call.

"They took our information on a Tuesday and said they'd deliver a cart that Friday," Valencia said, "and they did. There's a label on top that tells us what can go in the cart and what can't, and it has a lock on it with two keys. It seems pretty easy, and we started using it immediately."

Many compost and recycling carts in the TL that are put out for curbside pickup have locks, Levaggi said, because of contamination concerns and "midnight marauders" — people who rifle cans for saleable garbage and leave a mess in their wake.

Kelly Wells operates the Y Café on the mezzanine of the Shih Yu-Lang Central YMCA at 220 Golden Gate. The café used to haul its leftover greens up to the Y's roof garden, he said, and add them to the small composting heap maintained

by the gardener. But the gardener is no longer there and roof composting has ended.

"I like the idea of composting," Wells said. "It's socially responsible, something we really should be doing. I called Golden Gate Disposal to see if we could get a composting cart, but their computer was down."

Tariq Alazraie, who just moved his Café.com to 120 Mason, also likes the idea of curbside compost pickup. "Now that we do fresh juices," he said, "we use about 100 pounds worth of carrots and oranges daily — that makes a lot of food scraps."

Alazraie had looked into composting with Golden Gate Disposal when still at the old location, 970 Market, but never pursued it. He's will now.

## HOW IT ALL BEGAN

In 1989, California passed AB 939, which mandated that cities and counties divert 50% of their waste from landfills by 2000. San Francisco began residential curbside recycling that year. After planning and testing ideas for 10 years, the Department of Environment and Norcal Waste Systems began rolling out their "Fantastic Three" curbside recycling and composting program to about 10,000 households in selected S.F. neighborhoods.

Residents got the three carts plus flyers and brochures encouraging them to shift their thinking: Food and yard scraps, bottles, paper and metal are resources, not garbage. "One cart full of paper is equivalent to one tree!" proclaims a Golden Gate Disposal handout.

The program's success tells in the numbers: In 1999, the citywide diversion rate — for residential, commercial, public and private offices, manufacturing and other industries — was 42%. It rose slightly, to 46%, in 2000, and climbed to 52% in 2001.

And in 2002, the last year for which figures are available, the city hit 63%. That year, 702,012 tons went to landfill — the city's lowest tonnage since 1995 — and 1.18 million tons were diverted.

The city's diversion rate far outstrips the state's, which was 48% in 2002, according to the California Integrated Waste Management Board. More than 100,000 households now use the three colored carts. San Francisco has set a goal of 75% diversion by 2010 and should have little trouble reaching it, both Chan and Reed say.

Environment is a bureaucratic youngster in city government. The Commission on San Francisco's Environment, formed in 1993 through then-Supervisor Kevin Shelley's efforts, morphed into a full-fledged department in 1996. Its staff increased from five in 2000 to 70 today, and it has a \$9.4 million budget.

In addition to outreach to neighborhoods, the department makes presentations in schools and helps low-income neighborhoods such as the Bayview that are disproportionately affected by environmental contamination. It trains other city departments in how to increase recycling and composting, and operates a variety of environmental programs for the public.

Norcal is the engine of the city's diversion program. Besides Golden Gate Disposal and Sunset Scavenger, Norcal's other local subsidiaries include Recycle Central, the \$38 million, 196,000-square-foot facility at Pier 96 that opened in March 2003; and Jepson Prairie Organics outside of Vacaville where food and yard scraps are turned into compost. Last year, San Francisco collected 70,000 tons of compostable materials, up 10,000 tons from the year before.

## HOW THE PROCESS WORKS

Despite the Department of Environment's brochure proclaiming it's as easy as 1, 2, 3 to divvy up your throwaways, it can be a little confusing to remember what goes into which carts.

All plastic bags are garbage (black), but plastic bottles are recyclable (blue). Butcher wrapping paper is compostable (green), but junk mail paper goes to recycling (blue). Brown grocery bags can be used to hold throwaways in any of the three carts. Paper plates, likely to have food on them, can be composted but not recycled. The fibers in paper napkins and towels are so small that they'd be washed away in the paper recycling pulpers, but they can be composted. Except for a very few routes in the city, all recycling goes chockablock into the blue cart: metal cans, plastic bottles, newspapers, cardboard, white and colored paper.

Bones, verboten in most composting systems, get tossed into the green cart. At Jepson Prairie Organics, food scraps are ground and mixed with yard detritus, then pushed into bags 200 feet long and 12 feet in diameter. Held for up to 90 days, the closed bags' internal temperature reaches 140 degrees. After the bags are opened, the immature compost cures for another 30 days.

It takes one ton of scraps to make one cubic yard of the nitrogen-rich, "finished" compost, which Norcal then sells to commercial nurseries, wineries, farms and orchards, mostly in Northern California.

In San Francisco, curbside garbage and recycling pickup is an eclectic mix of old and new. Garbage collectors hoist the plastic carts onto their ultra-modern two-compartment trucks. At Recycle Central, workers separate white ledger paper from the less valuable newsprint and glossy-papered advertising, but high on a podium, an operating supervisor uses a touch screen to instruct which

sorting lines to run. Things get old-fashioned again when the baled materials are trucked out, some to ships waiting in the harbor.

Recycling itself has an antique heritage. According to Norcal's Web site, its subsidiaries' expertise goes back a century to when "garbage collectors, called 'scavengers,' went from house to house, threw burlap sacks of garbage onto horse-drawn carriages, and salvaged metals, rags, and bottles."

Today, at Recycle Central, 110 employees in two shifts process 800 tons of recyclable materials daily. The work begins on the tipping floor, a cavernous space where the trucks pull in and the garbage collectors dump the cans, paper and metal from the recyclables compartment. The collectors then drive to a transfer station at 501 Tunnel and offload the garbage from the other compartment. The garbage is compacted, hoisted onto 18-wheelers and trucked to Altamont Landfill east of Livermore.

Back on the tipping floor, front-end loaders scoop up the recyclables and deliver them to the huge, noisy sorting belts, which work on gravity — bottles and cans fall down and paper is carried up. Standing behind flat conveyor belts, workers separate metals and bottles of different colored glass into open bins.

In the back room at Recycle Central, 20-foot-high mountains of baled newsprint and white paper, most from commercial and government offices and much of it shredded, wait to be loaded onto 40-foot-long container trucks. Every day, 25 trucks leave the loading dock.

Reed gave a sample rundown of where it all goes: "Aluminum is trucked to Alcon in Tennessee," he said. "Tin cans go to steel mills and canning facilities around the country, but also out of the country. White ledger paper goes to mills all over the Pacific Rim, as does newsprint. Glass — 25 tons a day — is recycled locally, in Hayward."

Recycling is a big and growing business, but it's not always lucrative, Reed said. "The recycling market is extremely volatile — it can go from high demand at the mills to very low demand, all in a short time."

## STATISTICS SLIPPERY

Recycling is a vast topic. Try typing in "Recycling in San Francisco" and get ready to check out the quarter of a million citations on Google; for the United States, it's 960,000 citations. Up-to-date statistics are hard to come by. The Green Nature Web site says "paper comprises about 38% of our garbage" and goes on to bemoan the fact that the United States was only recycling 44% of its paper in 1996, while Europe averaged 50%. The EPA's site has a report from 2002 citing statistics from 1997-99.

And recycling statistics are slippery — it's a business, after all, and locales will use stats to their advantage. According to Californians Against Waste, in 1996, Los Angeles was collecting yard waste and counting it as recycling, then sending it to cover garbage in its landfill.

But none of this should stop people from doing what they can to recycle and, if possible, compost. And don't worry about it being something that only old hippies and tree-huggers do. It's a bipartisan venture that crosses all economic, social and ethnic divisions.

It may even become mandatory: City attorneys working with the Department of the Environment are investigating the feasibility of drafting legislation that will require all residents and businesses to recycle.

When you're done reading this issue of Central City Extra and are ready to toss it out, remember: blue cart. Don't have a blue cart? In the Tenderloin, call Golden Gate Disposal, 626-4000. ■

## Do's and don'ts of diversion

**RECYCLE:** most kinds of paper, all cans (even aerosols, if they didn't contain toxic substances), plastic bottles, aluminum foil. Paper clips and staples are OK, too.

• Not accepted in the blue cart: plastic bags, Styrofoam, mirrors, window glass or light bulbs, ceramic dishes, plastics other than bottles, juice boxes, paper napkins and paper towels, disposable diapers, computer disks and CDs.

**Compost:** all food leftovers, including meat and bones, food-soiled paper, milk cartons, yard trimmings, plants, flowers.

• Not accepted in the green cart: plastic bags, Styrofoam, plastic flower pots, diapers, kitty litter or animal feces, rocks, stones, dirt.

**Garbage:** everything not accepted in blue or green carts. ■

# Case managers point clients to added perks

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immediately into a freezer for 48 hours, to kill bedbugs. "We'll get them a change of clothes," says Katzman. "Bedbugs have been a huge problem in SROs."

The homeless, some malnourished and even disoriented, will face a host of details that most people take for granted, such as how to get new clothing, linens, and toiletries, the process of paying rent, keeping appointments and adjusting to that severe reduction in cash.

The McAllister's rooms will be filled by mid-June, Katzman estimates. The 74-room Graystone, a handsome structure just east of Union Square, may take longer.

## A REAL CLASSY SRO

"It might take two to three months," says Abbott. "We moved 10 people in the first weekend and could do three to five a day if the referrals came that fast. So we could do it in a month. But it is just so exciting to be offering this level of quality. The bathrooms have marble and the skylights are beautiful."

The Graystone, owned by Alex Patel, has been kept in such good condition over the years, Abbott says, that minimal renovation was needed. The sprinkler system was updated and the front desk area, where 24-hour service is necessary now, was redesigned and sealed off.

The six-story hotel will have a general manager and assistant, desk clerks, janitor, maintenance person and one case manager. Citywide Case Management, a roving UCSF social work team, will provide more extensive support services, Abbott says.

"Since 1994, an SRO (rent) has been out of range for anyone on GA," Abbott says. "Now, here is a nice room for people on GA. Some have been homeless for years. It has been a long time coming."

By contrast, the McAllister was a flophouse. But, under negotiated requirements of DHS, it re-created itself in partnership with Conard House to become a master lease hotel, assuring high occupancy. Freshly painted halls and rooms, a sprinkler system and new security measures, all totaling \$200,000, make it livable like never before.

"This hotel is by far the best it has ever been," says Martin Pagniano, 38, a resident GA recipient who gets \$410 a month and has paid \$380 a month rent for five years. "I look forward now to the cleanliness and sanitation. I have seen some pretty bad things here."

## SQUEAKY WHEEL GETS SOME GREASE

Toilets that backed up for weeks in filthy bathrooms strewn with needles were common, he says. Shifty nonresidents came and went at all hours, he adds, and some rooms had four people living in them. There was a murder in the hotel three years ago. It used to charge \$10 to visit after 9-to-5 working hours. Pagniano, who had a job during those hours, vociferously protested.

"I complained and complained," he says. "They'd finally fix the toilets and then they'd go bad again for weeks."

Eventually, Pagniano went to the city attorney, the Health Department, the building inspectors and the Fire Department.

"They came en masse," he says. "Things changed some after that. It was tolerable." And he settled his differences with owner Bill Bhatka (official ownership is Bhatka-Riley of Sunnyvale).

It seems unlikely that anyone would refuse what must be a longtime dream of many.

"It's not a choice program," says Scott Walton, DHS Supportive Housing program manager. "Housing is the best they (can be) offered and a small amount of cash. It really is a great benefit. But people may have other living arrangements they haven't told the city about."

"Some will stop applying (for welfare). Maybe they're not living in the county. What they get may not be economical any more. And they may not need the services."

"We'll learn by this." ■



PHOTO BY LENNY LIMJOCO

**A Recycle Central worker watches the mixed paper belt for plastic and other materials unsuitable for recycling. On the tipping floor, below, collectors dump mountains of cans, paper and metal six days a week.**

PHOTO BY LENNY LIMJOCO



PHOTO BY MARJORIE BEGGS



**Reyna Valencia, office manager at 118 Jones, fills the law office's new blue cart.**