

## NO Spring Plastic Round-Up, Why? Conservation Corner – May 2016

The Jackson County Recycling Partnership (JCRP) that houses the Master Recycler program has recently determined that it will be unable to host its Spring Plastic Round-Up event, which has been held annually since 2008. The original intent of the Plastic Round-Up event was to create an opportunity for residents of Jackson County to recycle plastics which are not accepted in the curbside collection programs offered by local haulers that include nursery plastics, film, plastic packaging and clamshells, for example. The unfortunate circumstances in the world markets have resulted in the decision to suspend the event.

Plastic recycling has become more challenging over the last number of years and more specifically in 2013 with the start of China's "Operation Green Fence." The Chinese government grew frustrated with the amount of "trashy recyclables" entering the country and the new premier launched stricter enforcement of existing laws. The aim was to avoid the volumes of poorly sorted or dirty shipments of recyclables from foreign exports. Additional challenges have emerged in the last year; and chances are quite high that this trend will continue into the near future.

The most important factor that has cancelled the 2016 Plastic Round-Up is a lack of markets for the plastics collected. Without market demand, recycling these materials is not an option.

### MORE DETAILS THAT HAVE CONTRIBUTED INCLUDE:

- One of the main factors is record low oil prices. The low fuel prices you may have noticed when you fill up your vehicle or pay natural gas bills have some down sides. This super cheap petroleum makes the use of virgin oil more attractive for plastic manufacturers. Instead of using recycled plastics to make new "stuff," manufacturers are choosing the cheaper option.
- Domestic and export markets for recycled plastics are overflowing. Globally, the slowdown in China's economy and production rate has affected the consumption of recycled plastic as a feedstock for new products. In some cases, smaller consumers of mixed plastics have had to shut their doors until better markets return.
- And finally, the strong US dollar has made US exports less affordable in the global marketplace, which has driven European companies to source recyclable materials from less expensive parts of the world.

Making lemonade out of this disappointing situation could inspire us to pay closer attention to the first (2) R's, REDUCE & RE-USE. Tips that reduce the vast amount of plastics in our lives include:

- Making different buying decisions.
- Avoiding single use, disposable items.
- Letting manufacturers and retailers know you like their product but not the "waste" that comes with it.
- Remember this motto: Use it Up, Wear it Out, Pass it On, or, Do Without.

The Jackson Co. Master Recyclers hope to resume the Plastic Round-Up when global markets improve. In the meantime, those plastics are still not accepted in curbside recycling. THANKS for helping to ensure a clean recycle stream!! Please direct Plastic Round-Up questions to: 541-494-5488.

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