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Green Tip: Shrinking your garbage bill

Folks collect plastics, other recyclables at church services

By Steve Law

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Every two months, St. Lukes Lutheran Church parishioners bring in hard plastics and other recyclables that can't go on the curbside. The congregation's green team then trucks the materials to Far West Fibers and other depots that accept recyclables.

As Portlanders start curbside composting of food waste on Oct. 31, they'll also need to adjust to home garbage pickup every other week, instead of weekly.



CHRISTOPHER ONSTOTT / PAMPLIN MEDIA GROUP

The folks at St. Luke Lutheran, a congregation in Southwest Portland near Gabriel Park, offered this green tip to help shrink residents' weekly garbage loads.

Every two months, Michael Hall and his cohorts in the environmental stewardship committee encourage church members to bring recyclables to church – the kinds that can't be deposited at the curbside.

“They're already coming to church,” Hall says. “They can just grab their recyclables that they otherwise wouldn't know what to do with.”

Folks drop off bags of rigid plastic, produce bags, appliances and other items in the church parking lot, before or after Sunday services.

Volunteers gather it up, load it into a 15-passenger van, and haul it to Far West Fibers recycling depot, or other places that take recyclables that can't be stowed at the curb. Far West accepts plastics, sports shoes, crayons, metals and other items.

Church volunteers also collect compact fluorescent bulbs and bring them to a Home Depot store, Hall says. They collect wine corks and bring them to SCRAP, or School and Community Reuse

Project, a Northeast Portland nonprofit. They collect printer cartridges and deliver them to Office Depot, which gives the church a \$2 credit for each one. About three times a year, volunteers also collect polystyrene, often called Styrofoam.

So far, about 130 households have contributed recyclables, an impressive participation rate for a congregation that numbers about 500 families.

Hall got the idea from an Agent of Change course organized by the Earth Leadership Institute.

“We have found the people who do the volunteering really enjoy the experience,” Hall says. “There are some fired-up folks.”

The environmental stewardship committee found that once every two months is the right interval of time for people to accumulate enough stuff.

Portland residents now have an added incentive to organize similar activities, as rigid plastics, polystyrene and other harder-to-recycle items take up a lot of space in a trash can. It’s not that much extra work to set aside such items in the garage, then bring them periodically to one of the seven area Far West Fibers recycling centers, or to organize efforts at their work site, church or neighbor’s house.

“This can be done in so many places,” Hall says.

Find out more

- Locations and details about Far West Fibers’ regional recycling centers: www.farwestfibers.com/Locations/NE-Portland.html
- Metro’s recycling information: www.oregonmetro.gov/index.cfm/go/by.web/id=24197
- SCRAP: www.scrapaction.org