

There's value in recycling's setback

We can capitalize on changing trends and aim to become less wasteful

BY R. LAWRENCE SWANSON AND CARL SAFINA

China no longer wants our garbage. That includes recyclables. Other developing countries have their own growing waste issues. So it's unlikely that waste formerly bound for China will be diverted to another country — at least, not for very long.

Across the United States, the recycling business is grappling with reducing contamination, narrowing collected materials to those with market value, improving processing and educating more effectively.

Communities are renegotiating agreements with recycling processors. Some are reverting to separate collection of paper and containers from the easier but dirtier all-recyclables-in-one-bin to reduce contamination. Some are ceasing collection of some materials — particularly glass, which mostly hasn't been recycled for years.

This shake-up in the recycling market is an opportunity to rethink our overall waste manage-

ment strategy and to re-evaluate the three R's — reduce, reuse and recycle — to just stop being so wasteful.

This is the time to put more emphasis on reducing waste creation. Take plastic bags — actually, don't. They are bad for most recycling programs and their equipment, as well as being an environmental disaster — especially the marine environment. The proposed New York State ban on single-use plastic bags is an important initiative for reducing waste and improving recycling programs. Support it.

Excessive packaging re-

mains a problem — too many containers containing a container, often not recyclable. If manufacturers of plastic packaging made the resin codes easier to read, there would be less confusion about what is recyclable, reducing the contamination problem that undercuts the value of true recyclables.

Glass bottles can be reused, and there are opportunities developing for recycling them as well. Perhaps a product that traditionally has been stored in glass can transition to another more recyclable material such as aluminum.

This also is the opportunity to wean ourselves from plastic water bottles. We are not among those unfortunate people

around the world who have no clean water. Bottled water costs on the order of 100 times as much as tap water. Certainly, an expanded bottle bill in Albany would provide a cleaner recycled waste stream than curbside pickup.

There are opportunities for entrepreneurs. Are there products that can be developed using recycled plastic resins? Can aspects of the U.S. paper industry be revitalized using recycled stock?

Perhaps waste-to-energy facilities can improve their recycling of metals. And, if plastic resins with no recycled value are diverted to WTE plants rather than tossed in landfills, at least there could be energy extracted for the electrical grid.

Communities need to aggressively remind residents of the importance of recycling. People are still largely unclear concerning what can and can't be recycled. Public service announcements are critical. Most important, schools need to once again energize young minds about the value of waste reduction and recycling.

Despite the significant setback in the recycling market we are experiencing, we should view the situation as an opportunity and a challenge to reset waste-management targets.

There is a bright future for recycling, particularly if we go back to the basic premise of waste reduction. Then the recycling enterprise can become more focused on improving processing and creating viable markets for materials that truly have value.

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Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand explains her plan to explore a run for president on Wednesday in her hometown of Brunswick, N.Y.

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dent. These decisions are not made quickly, and I believe she lied just to win her election. This was fraud. If she wins, Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo will choose her replacement. We will get a senator that New York did not vote for. All her time and effort for the next two years will be on her campaign,

not serving New Yorkers. She should resign immediately. If she wins the presidency, New Yorkers get an appointee of the governor. If she loses, she keeps her job. That is a win-win for her, but New York loses either way.

Tim Gallagher, Seaford

Nassau GOP created the assessment mess

Richard Nicoletto, leader of the Republican majority in the Nassau County Legislature, has it backward if he thinks his party is the voice of the people ["Nassau GOP is acting as voice of the people," Letters, Jan. 16].

Where was that voice when Edward Mangano, as county executive, threw the whole system (not to mention the county's finances) into disarray by freezing assessments, and then directing blanket settlements of grievances?

The Nassau GOP has been the least transparent group in our local government. Just ask the Nassau Interim Finance Authority. The GOP in general continually fails to adequately govern, but is highly critical (and often obstructionist) when the other side tries to govern. The people need and want cooperation from both sides,

not continual criticism or obstruction from one side or the other.

Denis O'Driscoll, Westbury

Feeding gulls makes them aggressive

Nice picture of a retiree feeding the seagulls ["Where the gulls are," News, Jan. 11].

Yet, it might not be a good idea. Seagulls are done a disservice by being fed human food, which can harm animals and interfere with their instincts to get food as nature intended. It also conditions birds to be aggressive by stalking humans instead of staying away from them.

Once at the beach, a seagull in flight swooped down from behind and snatched a sandwich as I was about to take a bite. I believe this was a result of humans interfering with nature.

Jim Brennan, Rocky Point

Unhappy about more money for schools

Great news: If there is anything our public schools need, it's more money from me. At least it will come out of my left pocket, not my right ["Cuomo's budget proposal: 2.03% boost for LI schools," News, Jan. 16].

What will this money do except buy votes? Give each school a dome over their Astro-Turf fields?

I honestly can't think of anything else we can spend more money on for local schools. Wait, I got it, hire even more voters, I mean teachers and administrators. We would just have to expand each school to handle the influx. While we are at it, let's fatten up their pensions.

Tommy Gregoretti, Oceanside

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