



PETER WAYNE

Eric Lombardi, executive director of Boulder-based Eco-Cycle, and Erin Makowski, a zero-waste service coordinator, stand behind one of the nonprofit's bins used specifically for composting. Eco-Cycle was started in 1976 by a group of local residents who introduced curbside recycling to Boulder.

Eco-Cycle facilitates 'zero waste' for businesses

BY BARBARA HEY

Business Report Correspondent

BOULDER — There's a revolution afoot, and Boulder's own Eco-Cycle is leading the charge.

In this era of vanishing resources and climate change, the concept of garbage is getting tossed, and in its place has arisen a new paradigm: zero waste.

Landfills are the black holes of garbage, the long-used end of the line for refuse,

much of which could and should be recycled, according to Eric Lombardi, executive director of Eco-Cycle. But dumps and incinerators leak pollutants into the atmosphere, soil and water table.

"Zero waste is the cheapest, quickest and most efficient way to reduce greenhouse gases," Lombardi said. "We have a comprehensive plan for zero waste, and it's truly unique."

This plan is shared freely with any interested community interested in a

garbage revolution and has made Eco-Cycle the go-to organization nationally and internationally for how to achieve a zero-waste future.

Eco-Cycle's initiative has earned it the Boulder County Business Report's IQ Award in the Sustainable category.

Part of the solution put into action locally is the new single-stream recycling and composting program. Lombardi's vision also includes a design for a 40-acre facility that could handle 90 percent of

the waste generated by a 300,000-person community.

It will be modular so it can be adapted for larger towns.

Based on how Eco-Cycle works with local governments, Lombardi also offers a business model to make this prototype center a collaborative venture between governments and nonprofits.

Eco-Cycle was started in 1976 by a group of local residents who introduced curbside recycling to Boulder — making it one of the pioneering communities in the recycling movement.

The nonprofit, which now has outposts in Longmont and Broomfield, still processes all recyclables collected by local haulers and operates the county-owned Boulder County Recycling Center. In 2001, the Center for Hard-to-Recycle Material, or CHaRM, debuted as the first community recycling center in the state for electronics.

By necessity, Eco-Cycle has modified its mission from minimizing to eliminating waste.

The next push—zero waste—entails uber-recycling. In addition to what has been tossed in the recycling bin for 32 years — bottles, cans and paper — this effort encompasses all things electronic, household goods, athletic shoes and cooking oil. The goal is to dump next-to-nothing in the landfill.

An additional and critical piece of the plan is composting all biodegradable material — foods scraps, paper and yard waste. If organic matter is tossed without first degrading in a controlled environment, its decomposition generates methane, a greenhouse gas “72 times more potent” than carbon dioxide.

According to “Stop Trashing the Planet,” a report co-authored by Eco-Cycle, reducing waste by just 1 percent could have climate benefits equivalent to shutting down 21 percent of the U.S. coal-fired power plants.

On the home front, Eco-Cycle carries out its goal to make this a zero-waste community in multiple ways. One is

“Zero waste is the cheapest, quickest and most efficient way to reduce greenhouse gases.”

Eric Lombardi

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
 ECO-CYCLE INC.

the Zero Waste Services for businesses, which for the past five years has worked with area companies, large and small, to offer education and training on ways to reduce waste.

Currently about 800 businesses participate on some level, which can range from recycling paper and containers to hard-to-recycle materials, like printer cartridges and copy machines.

Included is an assessment of current throwaway habits and education for employees to better understand what to dispose of where. Eco-Cycle provides full-service pickup of recyclables, compostables and “whatever’s left.”

Businesses “earn their stripes” by their degree of participation with recycling and composting, and also by adopting zero-waste purchasing practices, which means opting for products that are readily recyclable and made according to sustainable principles.

To facilitate enlightened purchases, Eco-Cycle has launched an e-Store on its Web site, www.ecocycle.org, listing sources for buying environmentally friendly products.

Eco-Cycle promotes participating businesses on its Web site, another benefit of signing on to the zero-waste effort.

“(Businesses) get it,” Lombardi said. “They understand doing the right thing does not break the bank, and doing anything cheap and dirty will catch up with you in the end.”

Beckie and Toby Hemmerling have always been vigilant that their company, the Organic Dish, keeps waste to a

minimum by composting and recycling. They took it one step further when they signed up with Eco-Cycle.

“It was great. When they do the audit, they go through your trash and tell you where everything should go,” Beckie said.

The Hemmerlings now also recycle hard-to-recycle materials, such as Ziploc bags and other plastics, at CHaRM.

“We bought some plastic bags that even said ‘compostable’ on them but weren’t,” Beckie said.

Eco-Cycle defined the real makeup of the bags, so that they could be disposed of properly.

Another enthusiastic proponent of Eco-Cycle is Barry Siff, owner of 5430 Sports, which puts on triathlons with upward of 7,000 participants.

“Eco-Cycle’s guidance and support has made it easy to recycle and compost at our events, dramatically reducing what we send to the landfill,” Siff said. “We stress zero waste in our promotional materials and at our events and hope our participants gain knowledge and are inspired to do it at home.”

Eco-Cycle Inc.

5030 Pearl St.
 Boulder, CO 80301
 303-444-6634
www.ecocycle.org
 Eric Lombardi, executive director
Employees: 65
Primary service: zero-waste recycling
Founded: 1976