

In Our Opinion: Encouraging recycling

By Daily Hampshire Gazette Staff Writer
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A report by the state Department of Environmental Protection has concluded that communities in western Massachusetts could earn an additional \$1 million in revenue each year by increasing the amount of paper goods that are recycled through a state-owned facility in Springfield.

The report offers one more good reason why communities throughout the Pioneer Valley can benefit by boosting their recycling efforts.

It's not just an economic argument, though. In addition to the environmental benefits, increased recycling can help extend the life of a landfill.

That, in particular, has become an important issue in Northampton as the city continues to study a plan to expand its regional landfill. The city believes the proposed expansion could add another 21 years to the lifespan of the landfill. Other communities that depend on the regional landfill also have a stake in the city's decision.

The report issued recently by the state DEP focused solely on the recycling of paper goods; however, it's clear the same benefits could be gained by encouraging increased recycling of other materials, including glass, aluminum, plastic and metal.

The report found that an additional 25,000 tons of paper products could be recycled each year by 78 communities in western Massachusetts. That would be a significant increase over the 35,000 tons of paper goods that they currently recycle each year through the Springfield Materials Recycling Facility.

To demonstrate the profitability of recycling for municipalities, the state released the amount of payments made to cities and towns in western Massachusetts during the last six months of 2007 for all recyclables sent to the Springfield facility. Those payments included \$45,836 for Northampton, \$30,786 for Amherst, \$12,838 for Belchertown and \$9,506 for Granby.

Northampton has emphasized the importance of recycling to help extend the life of its regional landfill on Glendale Road. A number of other Valley communities are looking at ways to expand recycling. They include Amherst, which plans to use recycling bins for bottles and cans at public events; Easthampton, which plans to study the way its residents recycle and dump their trash and is also considering expanding a recycling effort at Easthampton High School; and Sunderland, which is looking at the possibility of initiating a pay-as-you-throw program, in which residents are charged for the amount of trash that's collected at curbside.

At the same time, the importance of public education efforts cannot be overstated. That not only includes information on the location and availability of recycling services, but also the importance of recycling in the life of a community. There are limits to any region's ability to expand landfill capacity. The simple act of choosing to recycle will go a long way toward avoiding more difficult choices down the road.