



ALAN STYLES

Recycling

From your bin to a new product: how recycling works

Here's a frequently asked question:

I have a separate trash bin and recycling bin but I don't see the point. Doesn't everything get mixed up anyway?

ANSWER: Absolutely not! In Salinas Valley, your waste haulers use separate trucks to pick up recyclables, and take your recycling to the Materials Recovery Facility. At the MRF, all the mixed recyclables are separated by a combination of machinery and manual sorting to make the most of these materials. Here's how it works:

The materials are unloaded from trucks onto the "tipping floor" and placed on a conveyor belt to start the sorting process. Recyclables are sent through the pre-sort area where people called "sorters" remove trash.

The rest of the materials continue through the sorting line. Lightweight items, such as paper, are blown into one collection area to be further sorted by type of paper. This is why it's important to bag your plastic bags for recycling, because loose bags can be blown into the machinery and cause a nasty jam, where bagged bags will roll along with the system.

Heavier items (plastic, metal and glass) keep moving on the conveyor, where sorters pull out plastics Nos. 1 through 7, magnets pull metals into another collection area, an eddy current "shoots" out aluminum cans, and a shaker removes all the glass.

Once the recyclables are sorted, the separated materials are bundled into big bales and await their fates as future products. Recyclable items are commodities used by manufacturers, processed into materials that are used to make other products instead of using virgin materials, which saves energy and natural resources.

The demand for these materials varies like any commodities

See **RECYCLING**, 2C

RECYCLING

Continued from page 1C

market, but in the end, the process pays for itself, while creating local

jobs and diverting tons of useful materials from our landfill. Every item you recycle brings us one step closer to a future without landfills.

► *Alan Styles is recycling coordina-*

tor for the Salinas Valley Solid Waste Authority. His column appears the third Saturday of the month in Central Coast Living. Contact him at alanst@svswa.org.