

The New Authorities on Waste Reduction Your Resource Recovery Team

It seems like everybody is talking about “going green” these days, but what does that actually mean for local businesses? We decided to talk to two industry insiders, local experts working to make the Salinas Valley a more environmentally friendly place. Jenny Mitchell and Estela Gutierrez are both Resource Recovery Technicians at the Salinas Valley Solid Waste Authority (SVSWA).

BJ: Why did each of you choose to work in resource recovery?

Jenny: Reducing the waste stream and creating less of a footprint is very important to me. There are far too many resources being unnecessarily trashed. We all need to work hard to reduce waste, in order to extend the lives of our landfills. I enjoy helping people understand how they can be a part of that.

Estela: Before I took the job, one of my goals was to cut down on trash in my own home. Recycling helped my family go from 64 gallons of trash to 32 gallons a week. We cut the amount of trash that we send to landfill in half. If I can do that at home, then I can help people do it anywhere.

BJ: Wow, that’s inspiring! What if a local business wants to do its part, where should it start?

Jenny: Most businesses simply don’t know where to start. Sometimes, if you look at the big picture, it can be overwhelming, because there is so much to be done. When you have someone supporting you, who can provide assistance on a daily basis, it makes it easier.

Estela: Getting started can be as simple as putting out a recycling bin; many businesses only have trash containers.

Jenny: If a business contacts us, we will set up an appointment to perform a waste audit and make recommendations on how the company can reduce their waste. Whether it’s putting a paper recycling bin in the copy room, training the staff, or being a liaison between the business and their hauler -- we try to make it as easy as possible. We supply anything that we can ourselves, and

if we can’t, we will help the business find the resources. We can also do a cost analysis that shows exactly how much money the company can save by recycling.

BJ: How much money can a business save?

Estela: If a business starts and maintains a recycling program, their garbage cost will go down. Depending on the size and type of the company, you can save hundreds or thousands of dollars a year.

BJ: What do you typically find when you do a waste assessment?

Estela: We find a lot of materials in the trash that can be easily recycled: paper, cardboard, bottles, and aluminum cans.

Jenny: We often find goods that can be reused, too. Take, for example, five-gallon plastic buckets. We’ve been able to use them as receptacles for our new used battery collection program. They are also perfect for storing and redistributing the paint collected at our household hazard waste facilities. The buckets are recyclable, but it’s better to put them to good use.

BJ: What else do you find in the trash that can be reused?

Jenny: Stores that have nurseries often throw away plants to make room for new shipments. We make sure those plants get to nonprofits and schools for beautification projects. It’s really great to be able to pass on valuable resources to people who need them but can’t necessarily afford them. If a business has something unusual that they need to get rid of, we can also help broker that exchange and find people who can use it.

BJ: Wonderful! What is one thing most businesses don’t know about waste reduction that they should?

Jenny: Businesses are the largest contributors to landfilled waste — especially here in the Salinas Valley—and so much of it is easily recycled. Even if a company only



Estela Gutierrez (left) and Jenny Mitchell, SVSWA Resource Technicians, are available to advise your business on waste reduction.

recycles mixed paper and cardboard, they can considerably reduce waste and save money. We all need to be stewards of the Earth, and workplace recycling is a great way to invest in your company and your children’s future.

For more great advice, call Jenny or Estela at 775-3000. You can reach Jenny via email at jennym@svswa.org and Estela at estelag@svswa.org. Schedule your waste assessment today!

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