

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Why Should We Recycle?

We have all heard the mantra: Reduce, Reuse, Recycle; but is it really having an impact? Individually, one soda bottle or cardboard box doesn't weigh much, but each item adds up to quite a bit over the course of a year. Also, those soda bottles or cardboard boxes that end up in the recycling bin are given another life as a new product, but those placed in the trash sit in our Landfill forever, taking up useful space that could be better utilized by items that are unrecyclable, like diapers and Styrofoam.

By using data from a recent waste characterization study conducted at the Tehama County/Red Bluff Landfill, we are able to identify what sort of material is being thrown away, and whether or not it could have been recycled. On average, each Tehama County resident throws away almost 1,900 pounds of material per year – that's over five pounds per person each day!

By weight, construction and demolition debris, like lumber, concrete and asphalt shingles, make up the greatest portion of the waste in our landfill. Much of this waste could be diverted for beneficial reuse, like road base if it had been diverted.

Coming in second is food waste. Tehama County residents throw away an average of 122 pounds of food every year, or about one-third pound per day. That's a hamburger patty! If Tehama County residents reduced wasted food and composted what couldn't be saved, we could reduce the amount of waste landfilled by over 7 million pounds!

Paper products and cardboard are the third most prevalent material in the landfill, making up over 6 million pounds, or nearly 100 pounds per person per year. All of this could have been recycled, but it wasn't. Instead, it will never be used again.

In fourth place is plastic, which is easily recycled, yet each resident in Tehama County threw out over 68 pounds last year. Over 4 million pounds of plastic could have been used again for many useful products, but instead will sit in our landfill.

Why should this all matter? After all, the landfill has another 32 years of capacity, so what is the point in recycling all of this paper, plastic, or food waste? The answer is quite simple: we only have one landfill in Tehama County. While these recyclable items may not be worth much as a commodity, their real value comes from not putting them in the landfill. While diverting the material means less revenue for the landfill, reducing, reusing and recycling these commodities provides benefits such as extending the life of the landfill and conserving resources.