

April 25, 2008

Mr. & Mrs. John Q. Public
123 Some Street
Anytown, CT 06000

Dear Mr. & Mrs. Public,

This afternoon I found a white garbage bag in the garbage hopper at the Salisbury-Sharon Transfer Station. The bag had newspaper and a magazine sticking out of it. Upon further investigation, I found more magazines, two Aquafina water bottles, and mail with your names and address on them.

This letter is a **reminder** that recyclables, including newspaper, magazines, bottles & cans, and junk mail, **MUST be separated** from the garbage. The junk mail, magazines, and newspaper belong in the "Mixed Paper" container. The plastic water bottles belong in the "Co-Mingled" container. Please feel free to contact me with any questions.

Thank you for your cooperation,

Brian D. Bartram
Manager

Ps: Since July 1st, the Transfer Station has collected over 562 tons of paper & cardboard. This has resulted in a savings of over \$45,000 in disposal fees.



GEORGE KRIMSKY REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN
 Photographing the evidence, Brian Bartram, manager of the Salisbury-Sharon Transfer Station, takes a picture of a garbage bag that contains recyclables.

Manager won't trash miscreants

Ignorance, not malice cause of recycle error

BY GEORGE KRIMSKY
 REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN

Brian D. Bartram has the law behind him. Recycling is required in Connecticut, backed up by both state and local legislation.

Although it might offend some people's sense of privacy, he also has the legal right to probe through people's discarded garbage for possible recycling violations.

"Once you give your garbage to the dump, you no longer own it," said Sharon First Selectman Malcolm Brown, who consulted a lawyer on the subject when he received a citizen's complaint. This legal concept, although frequently challenged in police-search cases, was upheld in a 1988 ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court.

Keenly aware of public sensibilities, Bartram said he only examines discarded trash that outwardly appears in violation, such as a bottle neck protruding from a garbage bag.

The 39-year-old Salisbury native has a reputation for even-handedness in dealing with residents. His "reminder" letters never contain an accusation. They simply note what recyclable items were found in a garbage bag, which also contained "mail with your name and address."

He always takes photographs as proof, but doesn't always include them in the letter. "It depends on whether I think it's necessary," he explained.

A copy of the letter, with photographs, is given to the relevant town's first selectman, who keeps it on file in case questions are raised. Brown said he has received only one complaint from the 37 letters his office has received, and that one came from a merchant who object-

ed that a client's name and address appeared in the photograph. The identities of recipients are kept confidential.

Bartram also keeps on his desk at the transfer station a "Book of Shame" with some of the most photogenic offenses, but he makes sure nothing reveals the identity of violators.

Municipalities have the authority to issue fines, but neither Salisbury nor Sharon has done so in recent memory.

"There's no need, because we get hardly any repeaters," said Bartram, who believes that most recycling offenders make mistakes because they don't know the system, not because they don't care.

It's easy to make a mistake, because the rules in Connecticut on what should be saved and what should be thrown out are voluminous and changing.

The informational handout at the Salisbury-Sharon station is eight pages long and contains more than 100 pictures of household items that

can or cannot be dumped in the garbage, along with those that one must pay to discard, such as appliances and furniture.

Bartram said about half of the mistakes he observes are not recyclables in garbage, but wrong items in the recycling bins. The confusion is understandable: Connecticut accepts only No. 1 and 2 types of plastic out of seven categories, and that means, among other things, plastic lids can't be recycled. Corrugated cardboard should be recycled, but not pizza boxes. Glass is recyclable, but not light bulbs. The list goes on.

"When in doubt, ask," Bartram said. "There's no such thing as a stupid question." He and a full-time staff of three are on hand to do that five and a half days a week.

The most common mistake he notices seems to be a blind spot in some conscientious recyclers: They dutifully throw cans and bottles into the proper bins, but then they toss the paper bag that carried them into the garbage, instead of into the paper bin.

"A wet bag weighs a lot," he noted.

The transfer station is a busy place, and Bartram gets paid \$45,000 a year to manage it.

The average day's traffic was 478 vehicles in 2007, according to the meticulous records Bartram maintains on his computer. That's a lot of business for a district with only 3,200 households.

One reason the station draws big numbers is its very active "swap shop," where residents can leave off and pick through at no charge used toys, books, cell phones, clothing and other items for reuse.

"Don't lay anything down in there," Bartram warned a newcomer. "It'll be gone in a flash."