

TRASH 101

Today's lesson dabbles in the question—What is trash. Also known as garbage, rubbish, refuse, litter, junk, debris, scrap and waste, trash is anything that is deemed unworthy or useless. At times used to describe objects of art, creative performances and even living things, trash most often describes items we wish to not see anymore. So we DISPOSE of such items. We put them in the trash and every week the trash man comes and takes it away.

In Quincy, household trash is collected curbside once a week, taken to the Braintree transfer station where it is weighed on a giant scale. The man in the scale house then sends a bill is sent to City Hall and the bill is paid from your property taxes. From Braintree the trash is transported to West Wareham where, it is burned to fuel giant turbines that make electricity. This process is called waste-to-energy.

According to the contract between the City of Quincy and our collector Capitol Waste, household trash in Quincy is defined as refuse generated by the daily operation of normal household tasks. This may include everything from food waste to cleaning debris, to electronics and appliances and even to mattresses and furniture.

Not included in this definition and therefore not collected curbside is trash or debris from "move-outs" or "clean-outs" of rooms, apartments, basements or garages. Also not eligible for curbside collection are construction and demolition debris created by home improvement projects or renovations. For such operations you have 3 options. You can include disposal in the renovation contract, you can rent a dumpster to handle the refuse or you can bring the refuse to the Braintree Transfer Station at 257 Ivory St. where residents of Quincy enjoy a special rate of just ten cents per pound for disposal.

In any case, if you are a landlord you enjoy tax advantages that allow you to deduct the cost of doing business against the income. Therefore, debris generated by move-outs, clean-outs and evictions are considered commercial waste and are not covered by the City's curbside collection process.

Another type of trash not collected curbside is household hazardous waste. Household hazardous waste are things like oil based paints, thinners and strippers, all household cleaners including drain and plumbing cleaners, automotive fluids including oil and gasoline, fertilizers and insecticides and ni-cad and lithium batteries. For a more complete list visit the City's website at www.quincyma.gov. These products are collected twice a year at the DPW Yard and disposed by Clean Harbors. Our next collection date is June 4, 2011.

Of the utmost importance are all mercury containing products such as thermostats, thermometers, fluorescent tubes, CFL (swirly) light bulbs, button batteries and mercurochrome. Once released into the environment, mercury persists for long periods of time and does not degrade into harmless chemicals. Mercury can damage the nervous system, brain, kidneys, liver and immune system. Developing brains and nervous systems of children are very sensitive to mercury. Bring all mercury containing devices to the DPW Yard M-F from 7:30 to 3 pm.

Considered waste but certainly not trash is yardwaste. In Quincy, yardwaste is collected curbside each year between April and December. Consisting mainly of leaves in the fall, yardwaste also contains grass clippings, twigs and small branches. Larger branches, stumps and trees are also accepted at the DPW Yard all year M-F.

Finally, the most important of all trash is **recyclables**. Simply put, recyclables are items that can be re-used. Some items are used for the same purpose, like hand-me-down clothes. Other items like plastic bottles can be processed into fleece jackets and liners. Just about everything can be recycled by somebody somewhere for something. The reason recycling is so important is that we live on a planet with finite resources and we need to manage our resources very carefully for our own survival. In Quincy the process we use is called Single Stream recycling. This means that all our recyclable items go into the same container. No separating paper and cardboard from plastic, glass and metals. All the separation occurs at the Recycle America facility in Avon. This process saves the city a lot of money in our collection contract.

Since you pay for every item you throw in the trash, you also save a lot of money by diverting an item away from the trash and into recycle bin. Last year, you diverted over \$200,000 in disposal fees back into the general fund over last year. In addition, because Quincy gets cash for its recyclables, you earned another \$100,000 in actual cash for your recyclables. That's over \$300,000 extra dollars to improve the quality of life in Quincy. And the only challenge is to have a recycling container and to put the item in the correct barrel, bin or container. So simple even a cave man can do it.

We will discuss recycling further, in depth at another time. For now it's time for the quiz. Please e-mail your answers to recyclequincy@quincyma.gov for the chance to win a special prize. Include your name and address.

1—How often is trash collected curbside in Quincy?

2—What is the name of the company collecting your trash?

3—What happens to your trash at the Braintree Transfer Station?

4—What is the process called where trash our burned to create electricity?

5—Name 3 types of trash not collected curbside?

6—Name one item that contains Mercury?

7—Plastic bottles can be recycled to make what material for clothes?

8—What method does Quincy use for collecting recyclables?

9—How much money did Quincy save and earn last year through recycling?

Bonus—What can the City do to help you increase recycling in your home, school or neighborhood?

Please send your answers into me at recyclequincy@ci.quincy.ma.us No need to write the questions in your e-mail just the answer and the corresponding number.

In our next class we will discuss how trash is collected in other towns; other options for trash disposal and a few other things I haven't quite decided on yet.