

## As I see it

By David Lindstrom, District 3

Johnson County needs the help of residents of all ages to join its recycling efforts. Luckily, senior adults already are leading the pack.

According to a recent Harris Poll, people age 62 and older, whom Harris calls the “matures,” are more likely to practice recycling than are younger Americans. While an impressive three-quarters of American adults recycle something in their home, the poll found that adults 62 and older lead all age groups, with 81 percent recycling something.

In terms of what is being recycled, two-thirds of adults say they recycle aluminum or metal cans, while three in five recycle paper and 57 percent recycle plastic. Just over half of adults recycle glass.

The “matures” lead in every category.

Among those who do not recycle, the reasons vary. Just 11 percent say they do not recycle because they don’t believe it makes a difference, while 6 percent say they are too busy and 5 percent say it is too difficult.

That’s bosh in this day and age, with curbside recycling services, drop-off recycling centers, and yard waste collection being offered in many Johnson County cities.

Recycling is important in the Johnson County community, and according to the Harris Poll, the mature generation is leading by example. More generations should be willing to take action to tackle our environmental concerns at home and at work, and to get others involved.

A recent tour of the Johnson County Landfill in Shawnee and the materials recovery facility, or MRF, proved to me that more people of all ages need to recycle. Both facilities are operated by Deffenbaugh Industries, Inc.

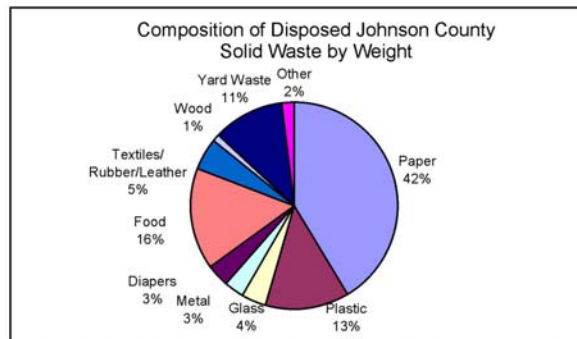
The landfill receives more than 80 percent of the trash generated by Johnson County residents and businesses, and the MRF processes the vast majority of recyclables that many residents so diligently place in separate bins for curbside pickup.

The Johnson County Landfill will close no later than 2027, and may close sooner if we do not reduce the waste we are disposing in it. Based on a recent study of materials being discarded at the landfill, we learned a lot about what our residents and businesses are throwing away. Most of the materials filling up the landfill are plastic, paper, yard waste, and food waste, all of which are largely recycleable or compostable.

The county’s citizen-based Solid Waste Management Committee has prepared a new Solid Waste Management Plan, adopted by the Board of County Commissioners in December 2007, with a goal to reduce the amount of recycleable and compostable waste filling up the landfill.

You can help, and here’s how:

**Paper.** Paper recovered for recycling accounted for 37 percent of all paper used by the American paper industry in 2007. Currently, 56 percent of the paper consumed in



the United States is recovered for recycling. That equates to nearly one pound per day for every man, woman, and child in the country. Every ton of paper recycled saves more than 3.3 cubic yards of landfill space. But paper is still the number one material filling up the Johnson County Landfill.

**Plastic beverage bottles.** Plastic composes 13 percent by weight of the materials filling up the landfill. Did you know that only two of 10 plastic beverage bottles are recycled? According to the Beverage Marketing Corp., the average American consumed 1.6 gallons of bottled water in 1976. Now fast-forward to 2006, when that number became 28.3 gallons! This could amount to 113 million pint-size plastic water bottles from 500,000 Johnson Countians alone! It takes more than 1.5 million barrels of oil to manufacture a single year's supply of bottled water.

**Paper vs. plastic grocery bags.** There are environmental consequences with either type of bag, so why choose one when you could use cloth bags over and over! These are now readily available at grocery stores and other businesses.

**Yard waste.** More than 11 percent of the material filling up the landfill is yard waste. Fallen leaves, grass clippings, shrubbery trimmings, and other organic materials can be transformed into a valuable resource called compost, which improves the structure and moisture retention of most garden soils. By recycling yard waste at home, you can reduce the amount that enters the landfill. These efforts benefit the entire community and ultimately your landscape. You can use a mulching mower to mow grass and fallen leaves, then let them decompose naturally and fertilize your lawn.

Missouri residents and businesses have been prohibited from landfilling yard waste since 1990. In Johnson County cities such as Olathe, Roeland Park, much of Leawood, and several subdivisions in Overland Park, many residents already separate their yard waste for pickup and composting. A growing list of cities and homes associations are requiring separate yard waste collection and composting in their contracts with local haulers, in response to concerns about landfill capacity and also a desire to act more responsibly in using natural resources.

**Aluminum cans.** Metals are 3 percent by weight of the materials filling up the landfill. From 1972 through 2003, more than one trillion aluminum soft drink and beer cans were thrown away. A trillion cans weigh 17.5 million tons. That's the scrap aluminum waste equivalent of \$21 billion in today's market!

About 30 percent of the aluminum supply in our country is from aluminum can reclamation, but we can do better. All curbside recycling programs and drop-off recycling centers in Johnson County accept aluminum cans.

Yes, recycling makes a difference, and your participation will help Johnson County deal with the solid waste challenges ahead. For more information on recycling and solid waste management in Johnson County, visit <http://jced.jocogov.org> or call 913-715-6900.

And thanks for all you do to be environmentally responsible by recycling something. It's simply the mature thing to do!

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