



## FLORIDA PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

*Matthew M. Carter II, Chairman*

### Recycling Makes Energy \$ense

*I am clean, and I am green!*

*Today, we are all looking for ways to trim our budgets. In past columns, I've provided energy conservation tips that can help curb utility bills. Although you may not think of recycling as a money saver, it's another way to reduce energy use, which saves money and also helps the environment.*

Governor Crist has made recycling a priority by setting a new statewide recycling goal of 75 percent by 2020, as part of the Energy, Climate Change, and Economic Security Act of 2008. This month, the National Recycling Coalition also highlighted America Recycles Day on November 15, so it's a perfect time to take a closer look at the benefits of recycling.

I recycle water bottles, newspapers, and soda cans every day, and it's so easy. Like my neighborhood, most communities have curbside pick-up programs or centralized drop-off sites. So instead of throwing a can or bottle in the garbage can, throw it in a recycle bin. By recycling at home, you save the energy it would take to manufacture new products. Recycling conserves our energy supply and preserves our resources.

According to the Coalition, aluminum, plastic bottles, newspapers, corrugated cardboard, glass containers, and computers are among the top ten items to recycle. Recycling a single aluminum can saves the amount of energy needed to run a TV for three hours! Aluminum can be recycled almost indefinitely, and making new aluminum cans out of old ones uses about 95 percent less energy than making new cans from processed ore. The energy saved from recycling a ton of aluminum would power the average home for 10 years.

Plastic soda and water bottles, so common in our everyday lives, end up in the landfill nearly 80 percent of the time and may take generations to begin breaking down. Discarded plastics have even become an environmental hazard for ocean wildlife. In America, 52,000 people are employed in the plastics recycling industry, making new products like carpets, insulation, containers, pipes, car bumpers, decking, and more. You may even be wearing recycled plastic; five two-liter bottles make enough fiber for an adult t-shirt or the fiberfill for a ski jacket. It takes 1,050 recycled milk jugs to make a plastic lumber park bench, and because plastics are made from oil, cities with waste-to-energy programs can burn plastics in their fuel mix.

Paper products account for more than a third of all municipal waste (by weight) in the United States, or imagine a 12-foot high wall of discarded paper being built every year from New York to Los

Angeles. According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), recycling paper for new products instead of using more trees generates 74 percent less air pollution and uses only half as much water.

In fact, the EPA says that recycling one ton of paper saves 17 trees, 17,000 gallons of water, three cubic yards of landfill space, two barrels of oil, and 4,100 kilowatt-hours of electricity, enough energy to power an American home for five months. Recycled paper, especially newspaper and office paper, is made into newsprint, copy paper, tissues, cardboard, and other paper products. Instead of burning old papers and adding more carbon dioxide to the atmosphere, we can save a 40-foot pine tree that will absorb 50 pounds of carbon dioxide annually with every four-foot stack of newspapers we recycle.

Glass containers are 100 percent recyclable, but according to the EPA, only about 25 percent of used containers are turned in to make new glass. Recycled glass, which is crushed and melted to make new glass, uses about 40 percent less energy than making glass from new materials. Glass containers in the store are typically made with 35-70 percent recycled glass, but that percentage could be increased since glass does not wear out and can be recycled indefinitely. With current technology, a glass jar put in a curbside bin at the beginning of the month could show up on the supermarket shelf in another form by month's end.

Recycling computers, other electronics, and appliances through special collections helps keep hazardous materials out of landfills, reducing waste and possible water pollution. In general, when we shop, we can choose products that have been made from recycled materials (look for the post-consumer recycled content on the packaging). Purchasing recycled products lets the manufacturers know there is a demand for goods using recycled materials, thus adding a boost to the economy.

Save energy and help the planet. Join me by recycling used paper, cans, and bottles for our generation and tomorrow's. Read additional recycling information on these Web sites: Environmental Protection Agency [www.epa.gov](http://www.epa.gov), National Recycling Coalition [www.nrc-recycle.org](http://www.nrc-recycle.org), American Chemistry Council [www.americanchemistry.com](http://www.americanchemistry.com), and <http://earth911.com>.