

School district gets awards for recycling

BY CHANTELLE LUSEBRINK

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King County officials will give two awards to Issaquah School District officials and the many helping hands that have helped recycle the past two years.

Officials from the county Department of Solid Waste will present the awards to Issaquah School Board members and John McCartney, a resource conservationist with the district, at their regular meeting Dec. 12.

The district earned the awards through the Green Schools Program, designed to reduce garbage disposal and implement recycling programs.

"It is a certificate of recognition, and we are giving them two," said Dale Alekel, program manager. "Each school and district that participates in the Green Schools Program sets a goal in selected categories, and in the required category of waste reduction and recycling."

"The Issaquah School District has done a tremendous job in promoting recycling and conserving energy and reducing water consumption," Alekel added. "It is a five-step program and this is the last step, to recognize them. It is important for the school board to know what students and staff have accomplished."

Since beginning the program in 2005, the district has reduced its garbage by 984 cubic yards of waste and increased their recycling by 1,044 cubic yards, according to Alekel.

"With those reductions, the district has saved nearly \$12,500 in garbage disposal costs," Alekel said.

That is about a 6.3 percent reduction.

"The county provides professional recycling assistance," McCartney said. "Its focus is at school, though, and getting the kind of involvement in and learning how to do recycling in buildings to help reduce our consumption. That started in the fall of 2005 and the program basically ended in August of 2007, in terms of their support, but the district is committed to support and continues to abide by the program."

"Often, when a district increases recycling and decreases garbage disposal, they save money by reducing the frequency of collection or the size of their

"The Issaquah School District promoting recycling and conserving energy and reducing water consumption."

— Dale Alekel

Manager of the county's Green Schools Program

Dumpsters," Alekel added. "We are conserving our natural resources, and the school can save money."

"It is a win, win, win, of course, too, because students and staff make a difference and it often inspires them to continue to expand conservation practices in other areas."

There are eight categories schools can focus on for the Green Schools Program, McCartney said.

They are: waste reduction and recycling, energy conservation, water conservation, litter reduction, hazardous material management and reduction, reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, addressing environmental issues in the classroom and environmental purchasing.

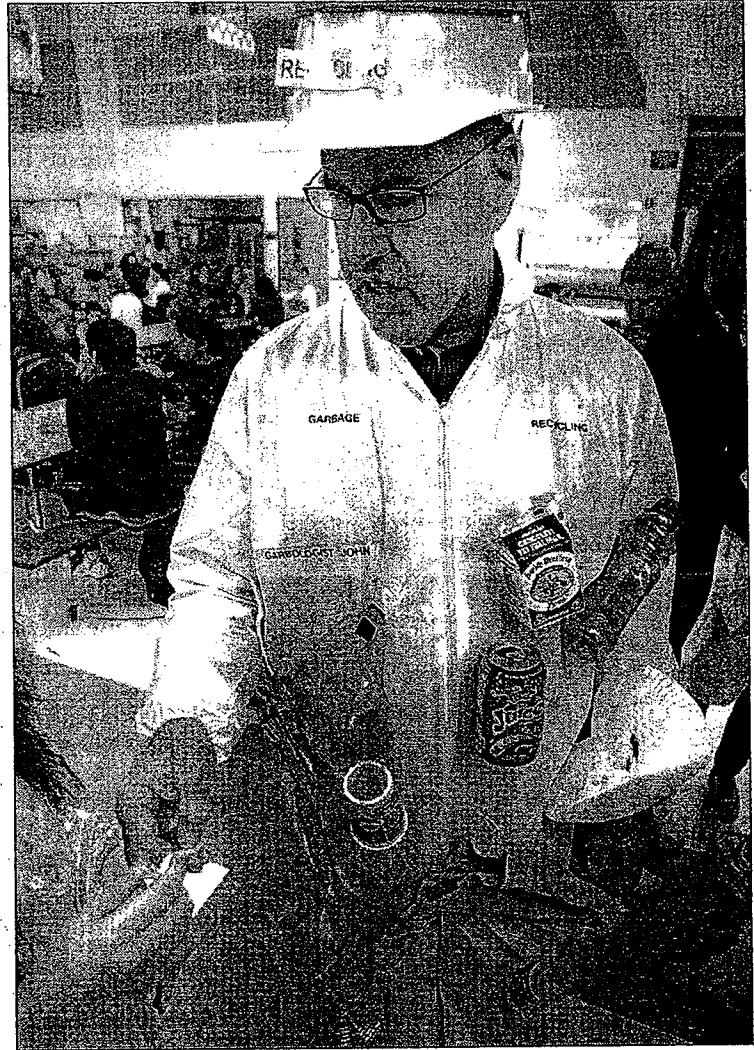
While waste reduction and recycling are required to participate in the program, the district has made significant impacts in each of the other areas, as well, according to McCartney.

The district "reduced its energy consumption by 12 percent since 2001, and that includes five new buildings, so we are still using less energy now than we did then," he said.

In addition, McCartney has monitored all of the district buildings' water bills to find ways to reduce water usage.

At Issaquah and Maywood middle schools, McCartney was able to reprogram the automatic flushing urinals, reducing up to 40 percent of each school's water consumption and saving the district a considerable amount of money.

School officials at Cougar Ridge Elementary School are also working toward a greener school, reducing greenhouse emissions by making their parking lot a no idling zone. The high schools are attempting to reduce hazardous waste with regard to science chemicals. And throughout the district, custodians now use environmentally friendly cleaning supplies



FILE

John McCartney, a resource conservationist with the Issaquah School District, this May answers an Issaquah Middle School student's question — whether plastic forks are recyclable (they aren't) — during lunch period.

wherever they can.

But the program has done more than just reduce the district's consumption, McCartney said.

"This exposure has gotten the kids involved," he said. "They now know the right things to do when recycling, so I'm betting there are a lot of families now that are doing a better job of recycling at home because of the culture the district has adopted."

"It is an educational opportunity that will influence the kids for the rest of their lives," he added.

McCartney is being rewarded for undertaking such a large effort.

"He is a wonderful champion of conservation," Alekel said.

McCartney, a former assistant principal and science teacher, retired from the district but they pulled him back onto their staff roster.

"I never really stopped. I retired in June 2001 and started this job in September of 2001, so it worked out well," he recalled. "It has been very rewarding."

McCartney has been with the district as its resource conservation officer for some time and doesn't have any plans of retiring again soon, or ending the district's green momentum.

He still has several projects and plans under way, like implementing more food recycling programs at various schools, continuing to purchase all-paper food trays for cafeterias and partnering with Puget Sound Energy to replace some school lighting with high-efficiency lighting.

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