



Recycling remains an important component of efforts to maintain our environment, but it is no longer viewed as the biggest solution to environmental issues. That is the conclusion that can be drawn from the recent presentation to the Springfield City Club by Angie Marzano, Waste Reduction Specialist in the Waste Management Division of Lane County Public Works. “It’s more important to eat all the yogurt in that container than to worry about how the container is recycled,” she said at her May 16 presentation.

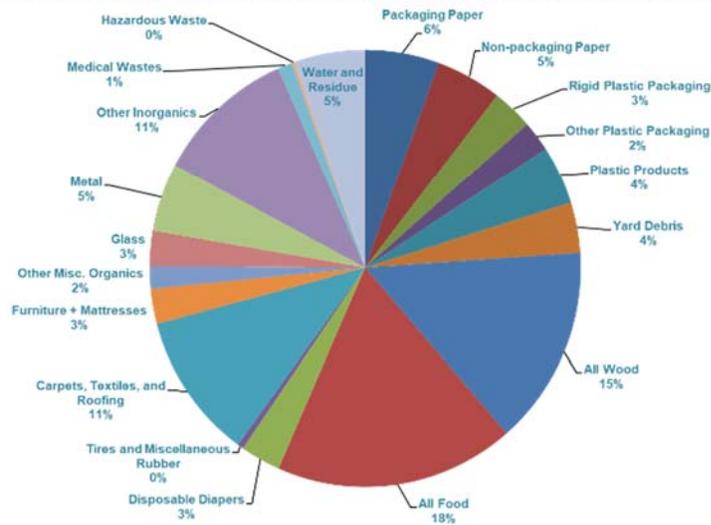
Recycling has changed over the past few years. Now Lane county haulers collected a commingled recycling component, with only glass separated. That commingled component no longer includes many forms of plastic. IN part that is because many plastic items were never intended to be there in the first place, but what has achieved the most public attention is that the major purchaser of plastic – China – has stopped buying American plastic recycling because it is not clean.

Today, only clear HDPE (high density polyethylene) plastic – clear milk jugs, water containers can be included in recycling. Separately, the County has held plastic roundups, where clean tubs, jugs, and bottles (stamped 2,4 or 5 on the bottom) can be recycled by plastic manufacturers. Even “biodegradable” plastics do not seem to be a solution. While California processors use more intensive methods and can handle the biodegradable plastic, Oregon p0rocessors don’t want it.

Ms. Marzano said the solution to reducing waste is simpler – simply reduce the waste generated. She presented a chart showing the results of the most recent waste composition study and noted that about 40 percent of the current waste stream is organic material that can be reused or repurposed. Wood makes up 15 percent of the waste stream and can be converted, by local forest product companies, into mulch and other soil components. An even larger segment of the waste stream is food.

Which constitutes 18 percent. A recent national study indicated that Americans throw about 33 percent of the food they purchase into their garbage! Although the Short Mountain landfill still has a remaining life of about 100 years, eliminating components like wood and food waste would not only extend the life of the landfill, but also provide useful products for consumers,

## 2016 Lane County Waste Composition



Sanipac, the exclusive hauler in Springfield, and the largest hauler in Eugene, now offers a program of separated collection of commercial food waste which is composted. Eugene will, later this year, expand that program to residential customers, encouraging them to place food waste in their yard debris containers. Although a similar pilot program in Portland ran into some challenges and opposition from consumers, Eugene officials believe there is enough enthusiasm about the effort locally to make it succeed. Ms. Marzano said that composting food waste in this way is superior to using a kitchen garbage disposal, because the Wastewater Treatment Plant must take special steps, and extra cost, to treat food waste.

She said that there may be future improvements in recycling, because domestic processors are beginning to come back online after closing when Chia began taking recyclables. But, she said, this will not be a real alternative to reducing use of waste-generating materials by avoiding excess packaging, purchasing fewer prepacked materials, and generally thinking carefully before buying something that will generate waste.