

## **Trailblazin' American Recyclin'**

Doing the right thing doesn't always come easy, but the pay off can be well worth the effort.

When Jatco decided to initiate a recycling program, we quickly learned that we had a lot of work to do. There were no curbside recycling services available for the commercial community in our city, so we had to create our own. We found a local resource who was willing to work with us provided we sort our own recycling stream. Our employees were so enthusiastic about "doing the right thing," they took over and it became an employee driven program.

Employees volunteered to participate on a committee whose role was to educate and monitor the effectiveness of the recycling program. The committee created a slogan and a logo (in Spanish and English), both of which were featured on the T-shirts that were distributed to participants. Since this was an employee-driven program, we decided that the revenue from the program should be returned to the employees. Between March and August 2008, 304,568 lbs of goods were recycled, earning \$19,718. With this money, the committee hosted several lunches and awarded many cash cards and paid-time off vouchers. Since its inception, the program has recycled and diverted from landfills a total of 540,633 lbs of waste. That's an average of 27,032 lbs per month, a number that still amazes me.

Why was this program so successful? Simple: The employees. They motivated each other and worked together to achieve something they all believed in. They even switched to clear trash bags at their workstations to monitor themselves. If anyone saw a recyclable item go into the bag, they would remind that colleague to do the right thing and contribute to the program.

When Union City held a public forum to discuss banning certain packaging materials in favor of others, we presented our recycling program to the city council. We advocated that doing the right thing meant diverting waste away from landfills, not just changing the composition of what goes into landfills. The city was very surprised by the volume of our diversion, and since waste diversion was their mandate, they voted against the ban and decided to learn more about Jatco's program. The city formed an industry Green Committee comprising local business, the Union City Chamber of Commerce, city staff and the city's waste management company. The first meeting was held at Jatco.

The Society of the Plastics Industry (a plastics industry group), Union City, the Chamber of Commerce and several other interested parties have since visited Jatco to see the program in action. They've all witnessed how effective recycling can be as a strategy for landfill diversion. They've seen how materials like plastic, which is extremely recyclable, can be part of sustainable commercial and office strategies. And we've all seen that recycling goes a long way. That's why this America Recycles Day, we encourage everybody to participate by making an effort to recycle more – at home and at work – and to continue that effort throughout the year.

By taking responsibility, we can achieve a lot. By changing our behavior and choosing to actively be part of the solution, we can create a more sustainable world, which is far more effective than banning products or scapegoating industries.

Right now at Jatco, our goal is to get to the point where we send nothing to landfills (zero waste). I encourage all Bay Area businesses to challenge themselves in the same way. It will make a difference. And if you're interested in talking to us about our program, we're happy to stop by and talk recycling.