

## **Recycling question of the month: What to do with wood pellet bags**

More people heating with wood pellets means that more plastic wood pellet bags are entering the waste stream. Since RCSWD is unable to recycle them at this time, what can you do with his mounting pile of bags to keep them out of the landfill.

Unfortunately, in Rutland County, there is currently no alternative to reusing the bags or throwing them in the landfill. Here's why we can't recycle them -- and what you can do to help make recycling happen:

- **Contamination.** There are usually leftover pellets and pellet dust in the bags. The amount left is unacceptable to the companies that recycle plastic into other products. We do not have the staff or facilities for inspecting, rinsing, and drying every bag prior to shipping them off to market. If the recycling marketplace won't take contaminated bags, that leaves the landfill as the only alternative (besides reuse, of course).

- **Many types of plastic.** There are no standard bag specifications in the pellet bag industry. Consequently, bags are made of all kinds of plastic. Some bags are even made of laminates of more than one type of plastic. The plastics recycling market requires that bags be separated by type of plastic. RCSWD would be required to ensure that each shipment contained only a certain type of plastic. We simply do not have the resources to ensure that level of scrutiny.

The wood pellet industry positions itself as the "green" alternative to heating with oil or gas. That assertion starts to come apart when that industry is responsible for leaving behind a sea of petrochemical-based bags. Some might propose solving the problem by making them out of biodegradable or compostable bags, but those options would be even worse from both materials management and environmental standpoints.

**What's a consumer to do?!** The first manufacturer to offer a bag recycling program will win the hearts and minds -- and business -- of wood pellet users looking for a truly green energy alternative. The same goes for the first retailers who work out such a program with manufacturers. As a customer, write to the manufacturer and let them know that you are dissatisfied with their packaging and ask them pointedly what specific actions they are currently taking to solve this problem. Let the retailer know that you would be interested in participating in a bag take-back program.

**Product stewardship** is the concept that manufacturers should design and produce products that are easily recyclable, and that those same manufacturers have some responsibility for how disposal of those products is managed. Product stewardship laws have resulted in the [free electronics recycling program](#) and other initiatives here in Vermont. For more information, visit the [Vermont Product Stewardship Council](#).