



Word from the Group Chair

San Antonio has no plans to improve the recovery and recycling of household hazardous waste (HHW), according to its 2010 SA 2020 “Creating a Pathway to Zero Waste” and 2013 “Solid Waste Recovery and Recycling Plan Update.” This

is problematic because only a small fraction of waste was diverted as recycled HHW, it is a waste of valuable reusable materials, and in landfills many HHWs will eventually pollute the environment and sicken people.

What are HHWs? This San Antonio Solid Waste Management Division’s (SA SWMD) official list of HHWs does not include all HHW, such as old gasoline from gas-powered equipment:

Aerosol cans, antifreeze, automobile tires, batteries, brake fluid, cell phones and accessories, computers, drain cleaners, E-waste, fluorescent light fixtures and ballasts, furniture polish, lacquer/shellac, motor oil, oil filters, oven cleaner, paint, paint thinner, pesticides, pool chemicals, solvents, spot removers, televisions, transmission fluid, tub and tile cleaner, used cooking oil, and wood stain.

What is City policy? Our SWMD does not make emphatically clear that its customers cannot put HHWs in the regular garbage. Article 5, Section 14-45 (h), “Non-compliant loads,” does not mention any HHWs as non-compliant. It is only in small print at the end of a separate section on HHWs that states, “Do not dispose of HHW in the garbage cart or pour it on the ground, down the drain or storm sewers.”

Why is this so ambiguous? The EPA determined that Congress did not intend to impose the hazardous waste program requirements on wastes generated by household consumers, so Federal law exempts HHW from hazardous waste regulation. Some states have enacted much stronger regulation than in Texas, where law still allows disposal of much HHW in the trash. This is troubling considering that many HHW present the same properties, characteristics, and safety concerns as highly regulated hazardous waste and due to the cumulative quantities comingled. Businesses have been mostly successful preventing legislation such as producer take backs and have instead put the responsibility onto the public and volunteer effort—which is what San Antonio does.

SWMD urges us to take all our HHWs to one of 6 City drop off sites. This is hard to do. One is open year round, one open six days per year, and three sites are open one day per year. To dispose of hazardous material at no cost, customers must be a CPS customer, bring a recent copy of their CPS bill and a picture ID as proof of residency, and pack items properly. SA SWMD reported in 2009 they

recycled 75%, or 489 tons, of the HHWs turned in. This equaled just 1/10th of a percent of all waste. The information we have is insufficient. More data needs to be collected to better understand true volumes, costs and risks.

Why is this important? Hazardous waste characteristics may include ignitability, corrosivity, reactivity and/or toxicity. HHWs can explode, ignite, leak, mix with other chemicals, or pose other hazards on the way to a disposal facility and in landfills they create toxic gases and leachates that will eventually make their way into the soil, air and water. A report by the Texas Campaign for the Environment, using 2012 Texas Commission for Environmental Quality information, claims that 40 percent of the nearly 200 active landfills in Texas are leaking toxins. Studies show that there are many flaws in the federally mandated minimal standards for landfill design and maintenance used today.

Like a page out of the “Emperor’s New Clothes,” we have woven an elaborate cover up, but we are deceiving and exposing ourselves. We won’t become a sustainable society without actively working toward better, more thorough methods for reducing hazardous products and assuring they are all reused responsibly at their end of life. Next issue, I hope to present some positive news on developments concerning household batteries.

*-By Margaret Day, Chairperson,
Executive Committee of Alamo Group*

Events

For updates on all events check the Alamo Group website, amosierraclub.org.

Battery recycling! Bring your spent small batteries to the meetings (excepting the socials) below and place them in the box provided. Thanks to Gay Wright for coordinating this initiative.

Group membership meetings at the Witte

Third Tuesday each month, 6:30 pm at the Witte Museum, 3801 Broadway. Free and open to the public.

Lion's Field presentations

Fourth Wednesday each month, 6:30 pm, at the Lion's Field Adult Center, 2809 Broadway at Mulberry. Free and open to the public.

Socials

These informal get-togethers are from 6-8 pm. If you get lost or cannot find a venue, call Loyd Cortez on your cell phone at 210-54-2052. Please check texas.sierraclub.org/alamo/social.htm the day of the social for cancellations due to weather or unforeseen developments.

February 18 Tuesday

Witte Museum, topic: *Thailand and the Maldives*.

Alan Montemayor and Cheryl Hamilton explore the Maldivian Islands on a small boat, spending 12 days snorkeling with whale sharks, manta rays, myriad fish and coral. On to Thailand for ancient temples, giant Buddhas, caving, hot springs, long tailed boats and lots more.

February 26 Wednesday

Lion's Field, topic:

Bees, Beekeeping and Colony Collapse.

A film will be shown on these topics. In addition, the Sierra Club encourages you to support [Save America's Pollinators Act](#).

February 28 Friday

Social: Little Italy Restaurant, 824 Afterglow Street. Join us for good Italian food and wine selection.

March 18 Tuesday

Witte Museum, topic:

The Many Benefits of Electric Vehicles.

Learn about ease of use and benefits of EV ownership from Volt owner, Russell Seal, Sierra Club member.

March 28 Friday

Social: Mad Hatters Tea House & Café, 320 Beauregard St. Good sandwiches, soups and desserts.

April 25 Friday

Social: La Tuna Grill, 100 Probandt. Good assortment of food to wash down with a beer. Join us outside and enjoy our beautiful weather.

Announcements and News**Volunteers? EPA Study Collection Sites**

The EPA is working on a study plan requiring particulate collection sites (volunteer yards) no more than two miles from the Vulcan Materials Company's Alamo plant, of which property boundaries are between N Loop 1604 and Evans Road, and Bulverde to West Green Mountain Road. The company's address is 4303 N Loop 1604 East.

Zip codes include portions of 78259, 78261, 78266, 78247, 78232, 78217, 78233. If you wish to volunteer e-mail Krystal Henegan, henagankl@yahoo.com.

Tablings

Volunteers are needed for the following tablings. For more info or to sign up contact Gay Wright, 210-362-1984, alamo.sierra@yahoo.com.

March 1 Sunday

Earthwise Living Day, Leon Valley Community Center, 6427 Evers Rd, 9 am-2 pm.

Get Outdoors San Antonio River Authority and SA Parks and Rec., Mission San Jose, 9 am-1 pm.

March 8 Sunday

Spring Bloom, SAWS headquarters, US 281 at Mulberry, 9 am-1 pm.

March 15 Sunday

Kendall County Outdoor Family Fair, Boerne, Main Plaza, 10 am-1 pm.

March 29 Sunday

Native San Antonio Land Heritage Institute at 1065 Neal Rd, 10 am-2 pm.

Carryout Bag Ban Update

As you know from December's newsletter, Alamo Sierrans have teamed up with Texas Campaign for the Environment urging San Antonio City Council to regulating single use carryout bags—both plastic and paper. We have met with the Mayor's Office and Council Members, some many times.

We have also met with some retailers to understand their concerns and offer solutions. One large retailer expressed a preference for a statewide ordinance that would simplify one system for all their stores. Such a measure has been introduced in California's carryout bag bill: <http://www.cawrecycles.org/node/6158>.

In February the issue will be on the agenda of the City Council Governance Committee. We are surprised that no draft ordinance has been presented but rather will evolve during the discussions. When this goes to vote will depend on the ability to devise an acceptable ordinance.

One worrisome development is that Councilman Krier has posted support for bundling plastic bags for curbside recycling to begin in fall 2014 when the new waste management operations begin handling thin film plastics. Please let council know that this is not likely a viable option. In 2008 Austin tried this and it was a failure.

Even if we were to adopt bundled bag recycling, it would not prevent bag pollution. Carryout bags seem to be the big problem. Some uncaring people will continue to toss out bags, and many "properly" disposed of in the waste still become pollution--they are carried off by wind, dragged out of trash cans by animals, or otherwise end up infesting the environment. Ask Councilmembers to take a detour down Jones Maltzberger Road into Olmos Basin, south of E. Basse road to see just how nasty the park is due to plastic bags. This pollution impacts all local creeks encompassing our new Greenway Trails System.

Plastic bag recycling is also uneconomical. Several studies indicate that it costs about 100 times what the material is worth, not including citizen labor for recycling. One study by the [Clean Air Council](#) found that it costs \$4,000 to recycle one ton of plastic bags, but the recycled product is only worth \$32.

We are also concerned about the continued use of paper carryout bags, which are also an unnecessary waste with a heavy environmental cost.

City Council is encouraging citizens to weigh in. We urge all Sierrans to be sure to email, write or visit your councilperson. Please, at the least [go to our action alert](#) and fill in a form that will automatically be sent to City Council. Our website has many FAQ sheets for

information.

Sierra Club Climate Movement Task Force

Scientists increasingly issue urgent warnings about the pace and extent of climate disruption. The Sierra Club is currently in the process of a nationwide leadership survey to develop a stronger and bolder climate movement.

To help in this effort, on February 4, the Alamo Group hosted a meeting of local leaders of diverse interest groups to contribute ideas.

Our report will try to build on the efforts and ideas of these other groups so that we can be more successful promoting local changes.

Coal tar Sealant Ban

Since 2012 the Alamo Group has been urging the City to enact a ban on coal tar sealants due to their negative environmental impacts. These are the shiny black coatings that are sprayed on playgrounds, parking lots, driveways, and streets. Safer alternatives are available in asphalt-based sealants that are, in the long run, less costly than coal tar.

The issue was submitted to the City Environmental Advisory Committee (CEAC), which also issued a request to the City Council for a ban. CEAC's Stephen Kale has done a great job researching the issue and recently presented his PowerPoint, "The Science Basis for Rejecting Coal Tar Sealants," to the Alamo Group.

The research shows that coal-tar sealants are an unacceptable cause of air and water pollution because they release polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) that may be carcinogenic, mutagenic, and teratogenic to humans. They are toxic to aquatic life in waterways that receive contaminated runoff.

So, while coal-tar sealants may cost 20% less than asphalt based sealants, cleaning up the mess costs much more. A Minnesota Pollution Control Agency study shows cost for a \$3 can of coal-tar sealant can be over \$135 per gallon with pond cleanup costs factored in. If health costs are added, the cost far surpasses that of asphalt-based sealants.

Many other cities and countries have banned coal tar sealants. Europe began 50 years ago. Austin instituted a ban on these products in 2006. The City of San Antonio does not use them in its pavement projects, yet its Housing Authority just issued a request for bids with coal tar sealants. Congressman Lloyd Doggett introduced unsuccessful legislation in 2012 to phase out the use of these sealants across the U.S.

We are urging you to contact your City Council Member to ask for a ban. Our web page <http://texas.sierraclub.org/alamo/alerts.htm> has Kale's PowerPoint and a sample letter.

San Antonio Architecture 2030 District

By John B. Hertz, Architect, and Alamo Group Green Buildings Contact

Ed Mazria first made an impact on the world of architecture and construction with his landmark tome

The Passive Solar Energy Energy Book in 1979. This was one of the first guides to building energy conserving architecture published in the US. His latest effort in a long career dedicated to sustainability is Architecture 2030, which evolved from the 2010 Imperative and the 2030 Challenge, which "challenges" architects, developers and property owners to reduce the Green House Gas emissions (GHG), or carbon output, of buildings until they reach "net zero" or 0% carbon emissions during their operation by the year 2030.

Realizing that trying to reform the world one building at a time is inefficient in and of itself, the idea of creating urban districts with this goal was born. The first 2030 District was implemented in 2011, by a group of Seattle architects. Currently, over 100 buildings totaling almost 30 million square feet (40% of the building area within the district) have signed on. Their success can be measured in the reduced energy usage (21%), reduced water consumption (7%) percent and reduced carbon emissions from transportation (22%).

Here in San Antonio, a group of local activists, architects, and properties owners have formed an exploratory committee to try to create the first 2030 District in town. Its proposed boundaries will follow the San Antonio River through downtown, bordered by I-10 and I-35 and extending from Brackenridge Park down to Roosevelt Avenue. Within this area are large downtown office buildings and hotels, the Pearl, the UTSA downtown campus, and more than five million square feet of properties that belong to the City.

It is imperative to support these measures and transition to a low-carbon world. The example of Seattle shows that there is a huge opportunity for improvement in the reduction of carbon emissions. The U.S. is second in per capita GHG emissions among major countries (Australia is number one), and more than double that of Germany, United Kingdom, Korea, and Japan.

While there may be some debate about the direct link between climate change and the unusual weather events experienced recently in Texas and the rest of the US, there is no debate that climate change is real and influenced by human activity. Buildings play a significant role in the production of GHG which is the major cause of climate change. Architects, developers and property owners have the opportunity to greatly reduce the production of carbon through efforts like the 2030 Challenge and the creation of 2030 Districts. We should all support and promote the creation of 2030 Districts in San Antonio and urge the City to become an active participant in this effort.

Podcasts!

By Kevin Hartley

Some of us spend a fair bit of time driving around and would like to listen to something educational. Myself, I put a new pile of podcasts on a USB thumb drive once a month and listen to them in my car.

There is a good directory of podcasts at npr.org. I particularly like [Science Friday](#), [Living On Earth](#), and [Nature.com](#).

Just now I thought, maybe Sierra Club has a podcast.

Duh! It is at [Sierra Club Radio](#). You can listen to these directly at the website or download them to your phone or PC with an app (below). Of note among these weekly productions are 2/1, with a re-broadcast of an interview with Pete Seeger; 1/11, interviews with authors of books *The Melting World* and *The Zero-Waste Lifestyle*; and 12/7, 7th anniversary edition with interviews of favorite guests including Tom Friedman.

So now I've subscribed to SC's podcast. You can also in iTunes or any of the many other good podcast management tools. Here's a [web page](#) discussing five of these podcast applications.

Thanks!

...To SA Offset Printing, Inc. 4115 Gardendale, San Antonio, 692-9166 for our nominal newsletter cost.

From [SierraClub.org](#)

Membership

Are you a member? Please [join or renew!](#)

Video Productions

Emmy Award-winning Sierra Club Productions (SCP) develops and produces video projects that reflect the Sierra Club's belief that every person is connected to, inspired by, and responsible for the natural

world. SCP also partners with filmmakers to create engagement campaigns around nationally distributed TV and film projects.

Visit our [YouTube Channel](#) to view more of our short videos. Of note are [Best Internship: 2013 Highlights](#), [The Cost of Coal](#), [150 Coal Plants Retired](#) and [2012 Successes](#).

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Alamo Group of the Sierra Club

Website: [alamosierraclub.org](#)
The Alamo Group is one of 13 regional groups within the Lone Star (Texas) chapter of the Sierra Club.
National website: [sierraclub.org](#)

Food for thought

Nature uses only the longest threads to weave her patterns, so that each small piece of her fabric reveals the organization of the entire tapestry.

-Richard Feynman

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