

# THE GREEN PAGES

## Hungry zombies help make the case for recycling waste



By **RUTH HEIL**  
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When George Romero wrote Dawn of the Dead, he sent his hungry zombies to the mall to find human food. Romero was pointing out that if you needed Americans, they'd be shopping. The story may have been fiction, but the truth is that our economy relies heavily on consumer spending, and all that consumption can be bad for the environment.

Recycling offers hope. Since the movie was written in 1978, more than 1,700 Pennsylvania communities began rinsing, crushing, sorting, and dealing with the proper disposal of their three-arrow-marked trash in an effort to reduce the waste from our live-and-use lifestyle. Recycling lets us continue to produce consumer goods without exhausting natural resources, but it doesn't work if all we do is collect the material. Our manufacturing processes must use post-consumer material whenever possible. It's good for our

economy, it's good for our environment, and consumers need to see that all that rinsing was worth it.

This is the backbone of what the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) calls Recycled Material Market Development.

The EPA, charged with protecting our environment, has learned that prevention through innovation produces much more meaningful results than just chasing after pollution. More and more, their action plan includes supporting private enterprise to come up with waste-reduction solutions.

The federal EPA gives money to state agencies like Pennsylvania's Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), which in turn offer technical assistance, incentives

and grant programs such reimbursement for equipment costs associated with increasing the use of recycled content in products.

From an environmental standpoint, some reuses are better than others. Burning plastic and tires as a fuel source may not be much better than trash incinerators that emit more carbon dioxide per megawatt hour than coal-, natural gas-, or oil-fired power plants. The tires can be better used as highway

sealant, as is being done by Crafcro Inc. of Allentown, or the plastic can replace wood. Kunkletown's Close the Loop LLC has turned 123,454 pounds of plastic into "milk jug" post-and-rail fencing.

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Deconstruction materials are another good example of illogical waste if unused. An old building is filled with wood, glass, concrete and steel, all of which are a ripe secondary resource. Meanwhile, some materials process easier than others. Glass, for instance, can just be cleaned, crushed and melted before reuse for new glass or in products like insulation, material for onlot septic systems or, as Greenstar-Allentown processes, formed into tiny beads that add a reflective quality to road paint.

The point is, both the government and the consumer want manufacturers and other businesses to use recycled material before taking more from the earth and if you have an idea on how to do this, you've got their

support.

DEP created and contributes funding to the Pennsylvania Recycling Markets Center, (717) 948-6660 or [www.pamc.org](http://www.pamc.org). Folks from DEP and the Pennsylvania State University sit on the board with recyclers and economic development authorities. The group provides assistance to businesses and focuses on the following markets: construction and demolition materials, electronic scrap, glass, metals, organics, paper, plastics and tires.

The economic case for recycling is made on DEP's website at [www.dep.state.pa.us](http://www.dep.state.pa.us) (accessible from the waste sidebar link). No direct-from-DEP grants are currently open, but the site provides a wealth of resource information, and if you are interested in future grants you should watch the "Grants & Loans" section, in particular those initiated by the Recycling Fund Advisory Committee.

Internet sites like [www.freecycle.com](http://www.freecycle.com) can connect the folks who need the material with those who have the trash. These swags divert millions of tons from our landfills and incinerators every year. In 2001 the National Recycling Coalition determined that recycling brought \$23.4 billion annually to Pennsylvania.

George Romero's comical, yet horrifying story of zombies returning from the dead to feed doesn't make me shudder as much as the thought that, after all these years, we are still taking, using and throwing away without any regard to the consequences. Today, the humans at the mall are reading the labels to see how products are made. They need you to supply them with something they can feel good about buying, and frankly next time I hope the zombies starve.

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## THE GREEN SCENE

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