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On America Recycles Day MassDEP Announces Initiative to Boost Textile Recycling

MassDEP supports effort to increase public awareness of textile recycling

BOSTON - In recognition of America Recycles Day today, the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) announces its support for a new campaign to increase public awareness of textile recycling which supports local businesses and reduces the amount of waste sent to landfills and waste combustors. The outreach campaign is sponsored by the Secondary Materials and Recycled Textiles Association (SMART), a non-profit, trade association whose members reclaim, convert and recycle textiles across the globe. SMART's primary mission is to increase public awareness of textile recycling to remove clothing and textile products from the world's waste stream.

MassDEP and senior SMART representatives recently held a "textile recycling summit" with stakeholders from the public, private and non-profit sectors to discuss how to increase recovery of post-consumer textiles for reuse and recycling in Massachusetts. Attendees included representatives of MassRecycle, the state's non-profit recycling coalition; the Council for Textile Recycling; Goodwill; the Salvation Army; and St. Vincent de Paul.

More than 230,000 tons of usable textiles - including clothing, footwear, towels, bedding and other fabric-based products - were sent to landfills and incinerators in Massachusetts in 2010, according to the results of a recent waste composition study published by MassDEP. Ninety-five percent of all clothing and household textiles can be recycled or repurposed, according to SMART officials. The Association encourages people to donate or recycle all clothing and household textiles in any condition as long as they are clean and dry at all times through the collection process. The 5 percent of textile materials that are disposed of as trash are either wet/mildewed or contaminated with oil, paint, or another hazardous material.

The donation of clothing, shoes, linens and bedding supports a thriving industry in Massachusetts and across the country. Charities such as Goodwill, Salvation Army and St. Vincent report that about 15-20 percent of the clothing and textiles they receive as donations are sold in their retail stores. The items they can't sell in the U.S. are sold to textile brokers who sort and grade the material into categories. About 45 percent is sent to developing countries as wearable clothing, another 30 percent is sent to companies such as ERC Wiping Products in Lynn, MA where they are converted into industrial wiping cloths, and the remainder are sent to fiber converters like Millbury Textile Recycling (Millbury, MA) where they are broken down into their basic fiber components to be re-manufactured into insulation, carpet padding or sound-proofing materials.

"We want the public to know all clothing and household textiles such as tablecloths, sheets, shoes, belts, and stuffed animals can be recycled. As long as the items are clean, even if they are stained or damaged, there is a recycling use for the material," says Larry Groipen, SMART President and President of ERC Wiping Products (Lynn, MA). "Nationally, only 15 percent of clothing and textiles are recycled with the other 85 percent is going to landfills or waste combustors."

Moving forward, MassDEP will work to educate municipalities throughout the Commonwealth about the amount of textiles in the waste stream and encourage them to promote textile recycling as a means of reducing municipal trash disposal costs while supporting local businesses. MassDEP also plans to conduct textile recycling workshops for municipalities, where SMART officials and charities will discuss the "hierarchy of textile recycling" and dispel the myth that only high quality clothing is suitable for donation. Other plans include updating the Department's web site to include information on textile recycling, soliciting municipal textile recycling projects through MassDEP's municipal grant program, and exploring textile recycling programs with schools and universities throughout Massachusetts.

"Textile recycling needs to become as familiar to the state's residents and as easy to perform as bottle, can, and paper recycling," says MassDEP Commissioner Kenneth L. Kimmell. "We are not there yet, but this new outreach campaign will go a long way in getting us there."

Consumers can locate textile recyclers in their area by visiting SMART's web site at www.SMARTasn.org <http://www.smartasn.org/>. An interactive tool (widget) on the site allows users to enter their Zip Code to identify the closest organization that accepts clothing and other household textiles for recycling.

"Recycling textiles allows charitable organizations to meet their triple bottom line goals: operate successful social enterprises, provide

much needed services to communities they operate in, and to support environmental efforts," says Terry Fitzpatrick, Vice President, Retail Enterprise for Morgan Memorial Goodwill Industries in Boston, MA. "We are pleased to be part of the effort to increase the awareness of textile recycling and to assist the state's municipalities in removing clothing from their waste stream."

For more information on the textile recycling programs in Massachusetts, contact Brooke Nash, Municipal Recycling Branch Chief for MassDEP at 617-292-5984 or SMART spokesman Paul Bailey at 410.420.2001. For information on America Recycles Day events, visit: <http://www.mass.gov/dep/recycle/reduce/ard.htm> <http://www.mass.gov/dep/recycle/reduce/ard.htm>.

Secondary Materials and Recycled Textiles (SMART) is an international trade association that strengthens the economic opportunities of its diverse membership by promoting the interdependence of our industry segments and providing a common forum for networking, education and trade. Since 1932, SMART has been at the forefront of recycling. SMART members use and convert recycled and secondary materials from used clothing, commercial laundries and nonwoven, off spec material, new mill ends and paper from around the world. SMART member companies create thousands of jobs worldwide. Our members prove each day that you can make money by being socially responsible.

MassDEP is responsible for ensuring clean air and water, safe management and recycling of solid and hazardous wastes, timely cleanup of hazardous waste sites and spills, and the preservation of wetlands and coastal resources.

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