

Local

Recycling center accepts plastic

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Americans throw away 200 million tons of garbage each year, according to the BFI Billings Recycling Web site.

That's enough to fill a fleet of garbage trucks that would stretch eight times around the planet.

As more and more of the nation's landfills reach capacity, waste-disposal companies are turning to recycling to preserve landfill space.

In Billings, BFI recently started accepting plastics to be recycled.

"We're going to be taking three grades of plastics," said Chip Horne, BFI Billings Recycling plant manager. "It's a donation-only kind of thing."

The recycling center will accept plastics that are labeled HDPE, such as milk jugs; PET plastics, such as soda and water bottles; and colored bottles, such as laundry detergent containers.

Items must be dropped off at the BFI Billings Recycling office, 458 Charles St., where containers have been placed out front.

"Plastics are too big to offer bins around town," Horne said.

He asked folks to rinse out milk jugs and take the caps off all bottles, although the caps can be tossed in with other recyclables.

"When we go to compact them, the air will come out of the bottles," he said.

If caps are left on, bottles will expand in the heat and eventually explode, Horne said.

"I've seen those bales blow up," he said.

Barb Butler, environmental compliance coordinator for the Billings Solid Waste Division, said she is pleased that BFI has begun recycling plastics. Butler said her office received two calls just in the last week from residents asking where they could recycle plastics.

"Our goal is to save landfill space," she said. "Plastics are some of the more bulky items filling up our landfills."

She said recycling in rural areas like Montana is difficult because the cost of transporting items to a recycling facility often eats up any profit.

"That's the hardest thing about recycling in this area," she said. "Recycling is a commodities market. Prices fluctuate."

Horne said plastics collected at BFI will be shipped to KB Recycling in Clackamas, Ore. He expects the service to be permanent and said he has worked with KB Recycling for the past year to ensure the success of the arrangement.