

Textile Summit Discusses Keeping the Momentum Going in Year Two

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SYRACUSE - Following ReClotheNY's successful kick-off and first year, discussion at the Second Textile Summit on Oct. 2 centered on how to keep the momentum going. Suggestions include legislation, metrics, continuing education and presenting a consistent message.



Dan Rain, above, welcomes attendees to the Textile Summit.

Dan Rain, co-chair of NYSAR³'s Textile Committee, led the group about 30 attendees at the Syracuse Center of Excellence (CoE) Center for Sustainable Solutions.

"I hope we are making a dent in that 85% of unrecovered textiles," Rain said about the ReClotheNY campaign. "We have to get the word out, that this material is very recoverable."

Eric Stuben from TransAmerican, (clothing collectors and processors), and vice president of SMART, spoke on **markets**. He said that in the US, the demand for used clothing has been affected by a drop in commodities (the wiping rag market substantially dropped). The demand has also softened for secondhand clothes. According to Eric, as the recession pulls back and people have more money to spend, they are buying new clothing again. But he encouraged participants of the summit to remain optimistic about textile recycling, as it will likely bounce back.

Christin Dixon, with the Rescue Mission Alliance of Syracuse, spoke from the **collector's perspective**. She said the Rescue Mission continues to make more partnerships in order to remain successful. The group uses three methods for collection: Donations Centers that have an attendant. (and are usually located in Wegman's parking lots); Regional Drop-offs; and Donation Bins.

"Our textile donations are stagnant, and we really need these materials," Dixon said, noting that textile collections and sales fund the Rescue Missions. She estimated that out of the used textiles they collect, 60% are re-used and 40% are recycled. She said another anomaly for textiles is that "people want their stuff

to stay local."

"How can we all work together?" Rain asked. "We don't want to foster competition. There is plenty out there for everyone."

Jan Oatman, Recycling Coordinator at DANC, reported on the **municipal perspective**. Since transfer stations are ideal spots for textile donation drop off boxes, during the past year she has worked with St. Pauley Textiles to place drop-off boxes at different locations, including 11 in Jefferson County, two in Lewis County and three at Fort Drum. Oatman said although there is still a strong market for the re-use market (saleable textiles in better condition); she sees a lack of opportunity for recycling the "worn and torn" segment.

Summit discussion then focused on the issue of "worn and torn" items - whether to promote this material or not (since the wiping rag market is slow). However, advice from Nicholas Colandra of Hearts for the Homeless is: "put it in the bin. Let us (the collectors land processors) make the decision about where it should go. To collect more of what we want, we have to collect more of everything."

Cooperative efforts among groups was another topic discussed. Gary Carrell of Erie County spoke about a coalition of groups in Erie County and the Buffalo area that had good success by joining together. Profits were split among the charitable groups, and it also gave the public more options. "People don't have to pick one organization to support. They are all benefitting." He also noted it is critical to get elected officials involved.



Gary Carrell talked about textile recycling efforts in western New York.

Carrell said one place the Western New York group targeted was malls. The program gave out coupon books (for mall stores) if people donated. Another mall program featured small drop off boxes located in stores, (although he said this was a little difficult to keep picked up).

Assemblyman Edward C. Braunstein, District 26, (participating via speaker-

phone), clarified **pending legislation** which would provide more transparency to textile donation bins in New York state.

"People were under the impression these bins were always charity," Braunstein said. With language based on a New York City bill, disclosure requirements on bins would spell out where the clothes (or money from their sale) are going.

The bill would also have a maintenance requirement (that garments are picked up in a timely manner), and allow a municipality the option of removing bins placed on public property (and establish a schedule of fines for non-compliance). The bill has been passed in both houses and waiting the signature of the governor.

Melissa Young, Chair of the Textile Committee, reporting on a regional textile summit in Boston she had recently attended, said the Massachusetts textile program is focusing on consistency and presenting the same message across the state, developing a bin sticker program.

Rhode Island's statewide textile program (ritextiles.org) also concentrates on a simple and streamlined message. What makes them unique is that all collectors statewide collaborated on the message: "basically they take anything, as long as it is clean, dry and odorless."

Another idea attendees had was bringing the clothing industry into the circle. "They are generating all this material - they need to be in the room too," one said.

Jessica Schreiber, of NYCDOS, noted that in New York City they are working with a number of fashion retailers, who are embracing the sustainability angle. "Make it (textile recycling) fashionable" she said.

Andrew Radin said retailers could put recycling instructions as part of garment labeling, suggesting recycling for end-of-life disposal.

Lester Platt told participants to remember "whenever you recycle, you displace the primary material. They (retailers) aren't always happy about that (creating a resale market for used clothing). Platt also cautioned the group not to ignore the textile recycling industry that is presently in place.

Although generally deemed as problematic, two municipalities reported on curbside textile collections. Madison County has a curbside textile pick up program, where old clothing can be included in co-mingled recycle bags. NYC program has a pilot program now underway, where DPW workers are working in conjunction with private recycling collectors, providing 200,000 residents with curbside textile pick up.