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A green stand at the fair

Citing cost savings, state pollution control agency officials are exhorting fairgoers to go home and recycle.

By [Dee DePass](#), Star Tribune

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The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) is at the Minnesota State Fair pleading with consumers to boost their recycling efforts, which could save Minnesota manufacturers \$250 million in material costs and slash energy costs by nearly half a billion dollars.

"With commodity prices rising, the value of our throwaway materials is rising," said Wayne Gjerde, MPCA recycling market development coordinator. In 2005, "the value of what we were throwing in the garbage and not recycling was worth about \$167 million. At today's commodity prices, it's worth \$250 million." The cost of making new steel, copper and even paper has skyrocketed as demand from China and India for raw materials have exploded in recent years.

Scrap and trash recycling saves on materials and boosts energy savings, Gjerde added. "It just costs less money for a manufacturer to make a new aluminum can, glass or paper from recycled materials. Last year, Minnesota manufacturers using that material were able to reduce their energy costs by about \$475 million," he said.

To drive home the point of what is possible, this year's Eco Experience Building at the fair features Trash Mountain, a walk-through, garbage-heap of an exhibit that shows the effects of tossing pop and paint cans into landfills rather than recycling the metal.

Gjerde's exhibit also features several made-in-Minnesota products manufactured from junk. Displays include Shetka Stone's counters made out of recycled paper, Anchor Glass' bottles made from ground up wine, beer and other bottles, Master Mark Plastics' decking, and Smead notebooks, which contain a high percentage of post-consumer waste paper.

But the product that drew the highest number of spectators Monday was Vast Enterprises, the year-old Minneapolis company that turns chopped tires, plastic milk jugs, syringes and other medical plastics into extruded "brick pavers" for use in garden patios, driveways and elevated deck patios.

It takes "750 car tires stacked up to make one, short 1,500-square-foot driveway," said Vast co-founder and CFO Andy Vander Woude. "That's a lot of tires."

The company, which launched last year, won the 2006 Minnesota Cup for innovative new

business. Vast expects sales to reach "seven digits within the next 12 to 18 months," Vander Woude said. "It's been fun. The response to the product has been overwhelming. ... It's pretty mind-boggling to see. It really looks and feels like the [colored] concrete brick" but without the environmental baggage."

About 96 percent of the product is made from recycled "crumb rubber and plastic," said co-founder George Solnitzky as he handed a brick to a bystander.

The idea was a hit with retiree Larry Backlund, who said he will consider the material for a lake house he is rebuilding.

"It looks good and feels good and looks like it would be fairly easy for a do-it-yourselfer to install," Backlund said. "I really like the idea of recycling, which I have been doing for 30 years. I am always intrigued by these new technologies out there."

Others shared his sentiment. Arctic Cat hauled in its new biodiesel ATV from Thief River Falls. On the other side of the building from Trash Mountain, Bloomington-based Toro, which is better known for its lawn mowers, introduced its new model of the Workman, a hydrogen-powered utility vehicle.

"Look, there's hydrogen and canister fuel cells," explained Chuck Matthews to his wife, Sandy. The couple, who came from upstate New York to visit Minnesota's fair, said they have been recycling for decades.

Matthews, a retired Air Force and computer engineer, said he once even recycled and rewired a telephone pole from an area dump. "We recycle everything we can," he said.

That's the kind of determination Gjerde was looking for as he darted past the solar car built by U of M students and by windmill blades and signs boasting Suzlon Energy's wind turbine factory in Pipestone.

Gjerde entered the environmentally friendly Eco House in the center of the Eco Experience hall and quickly pointed out more of Minnesota's recycling prowess.

"These glass tiles in the wall are made from recycled bottles and this countertop made of paper," he said. "Using recycled materials saves so much energy, it's the equivalent of taking 1 million cars off the road."

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