

# Recycling In Chile: Fact Or Fiction?

> By Ada Letelier. Published On: Fri, Dec 4th, 2009.

“Really,” I said. “Chile recycles?” But there it was, tucked away at the bottom of the page, a small info box entitled ¿dónde reciclar?, in of all places, La Tercera’s week-end magazine, Mujer. Along with an eye catching picture of a mound of colorful glass bottles, there was a listing of the various web-sites that one could contact to find out where to recycle glass, plastic, aluminum and paper.

But after an exhaustive search of the web-sites listed, I was still at a loss as to where I could dispose of my solid household waste that qualified for recycling. And we all know that an informed citizenry is the first line of defense; so why is this information so difficult to access?

What I learned was that Chile, in fact, does have some very strong recycling programs in place. Some have been around for over 30 years. I was also pleased to read that Chile is part of the Hewlett-Packard Planet Partners along with Brazil, Columbia and Peru.

The HP Planet Partners’ program dedicates itself to recycling e-waste (electronic waste) from countries all around the world. Further, the giant conglomerate, Nestlé in partnership with Recycla Chile, SA, an NGO (non-governmental organization), has developed a program of recycling of all its e-waste generated from its headquarters in Santiago, Chile, following the most strict environmental regulations.

Chile also adheres to the 3R’s of the recycling movement, as do most countries worldwide. They are reduce, reuse and recycle. This basic tenet asks us to reduce the amount of solid waste we generate on a daily basis, reuse what we have on hand and finally, recycle the left-overs by finding new applications for the materials being discarded.

Chile has also initiated a campaign to recycle used tires and then use them along with other materials to pave roads.

The fashion industry in Chile has also “gone green” designing clothing lines using recycled materials in the manufacture of their clothes. Some examples are earrings made from recycled polyethylene plastic bottles, belts from recycled cassette ribbons (remember those!) and dresses and boots from plastic bags.

There are two major recycling efforts existing side-by-side in Chile – unfortunately none of them on a national level – recycling as a means of generating money for social organizations and/or charities and recycling because it is good for the environ-ment, helps to reduce pollution and conserves the earth’s natural resources – every ton of paper recycled saves up to 17 trees (Source: Planet Pals).

Some of the organizations that are working with local municipalities to encourage their residents to support their activities by donating their recyclable items to them are:

CODEFF – Comité Nacional Pro Defensa de la Flora y Fauna (National Committee for the Protection of Chile's Flora and Fauna). This campaign got under way in 1997. In partnership with Cristalería Toro, Chile's leading manufacturer of glass containers, they are presently working in four of Chile's 15 regions – Regions RM (Metropolitan Region), V, VI and VII. They recycle glass only.

COANIQUEM – La Corporación de Ayuda al Niño Quemado (Corporation that Helps Critically Burned Children). The six regions they can be found in are Regions II, RM, IV, V, VI and VII. They recycle glass only.

Cenfa – Centro Nacional de la Familia (The National Family Center). They provide help and guidance to needy families. They are partnered with Coca-Cola and Recipet. They recycle plastic bottles only.

FUNDACIÓN SAN JOSE – (The San Jose Foundation). They provide help for abandoned children. They collect paper and cardboard for recycling purposes.

UN TECHO PARA CHILE – (A Roof for Chile). They provide help for home- less families. They collect and recycle Tetra Pak cardboard containers. These are the containers most of Chile's milk and juices are packaged in. Recycled materials are used in the construction of low-income housing for homeless and/or needy families. What these organizations have in common is that they have joined two worthy causes together – recycling and charitable giving. Anyone who is concerned with either of these causes may contribute, not by giving money, but by donating their recyclable items to these organizations, who will in turn, collect, transfer and dispose of them in an environmentally safe manner. Revenues earned from these endeavors will then be donated to the charity that has been earmarked for this money.

So how does this work?

Some of the organizations mentioned have placed recycling containers, with their logo imprinted on them, in the streets of the municipalities where they are presently working. Others require you to bring your recyclable items to a designated area where they will be picked up and sent to the appropriate plant for recycling or manufacture into new products. I now know that if I want to dispose of my glass bottles (those that are not returned to the supermarket for a deposit return on my next purchase), I should look for blue containers marked CODEFF OR COANIQUEM, plastic bottles should be deposited in yellow containers marked CENFA – these usually found near or in local supermarkets. This takes care of the recycling end of this process.

However, if you want to support children who are severely burned, then make sure you put your glass bottles into containers marked COANIQUEM and not CODEFF or monies earned from your recycled items will go to support Chile's flora and fauna.

If you don't care which charity gets your money, then go ahead and dispose of your glass bottles in either container. Many of these containers can be found in or near local supermarkets, restaurants or strategically placed in schools, parks and/or plazas, or on busy street corners. Paper is recycled from offices, businesses and schools.

One just has to call either Sorepa (Sociedad Recuperadora de Papel, S.A.) or Recupac, two organizations that will provide your business or school with containers for your recycled paper. They will pick-up when you call and report that your container is full. And if you are lucky enough to live in upscale Vitacura, you can join their recycling program, Punto Limpio.

Punto Limpio is exactly what it names implies – a beautifully landscaped recycling center located in Vitacura where residents of this community can dispose of their recyclable items into attractively colored and labeled receptacles. There are bins for glass, plastic, aluminum and paper.

So, I asked myself, where are the containers in my neighborhood. I went walking around Bellavista and found only one container two blocks from my apartment building. It was a Codeff container. Another one located further away was in such bad shape, I could not make out what it said on the outside of the container. I had no way of knowing which charity I would be supporting. And this was after I had walked around for a while with a bag full of glass bottles.

Why is this so hard, I asked myself. There must be another way to do this. I resolved to speak with the manager in charge of my building. As luck would have it, I bumped into him as I was exiting the elevator.

“May I ask you a question?” I asked. “Certainly,” he said.

“Does this building recycle? What items does it recycle? What happens to the glass, bottles and metal cans that I am asked to separate for purposes of preventing accidents to the workers who collect the garbage? Do they get recycled? What about paper and plastic bottles? I know I separate them and put them in separate piles inside the garbage chute room. Does all the garbage get lumped together and thrown away in one huge plastic bag like everyone says?”

“Which question would you like me to answer first,” he asked, as he looked at me with the same look I get at supermarkets and department stores when I say no to the plastic bags they try to give me.

“Yes,” he answered, “we do recycle in this building. My staff knows what needs to be separated for recycling purposes. Recycled items are then dropped off at designated places. The money we earn from the sale of the recycled items is used to buy additional cleaning supplies for the custodial staff. We also buy paper towels and toilet paper for the gym and recreation rooms as well as for the custodial lounge area. If you like I can give you a picture of my crew at work in the recycling area.”

Recycling area, my heart skipped a beat! At long last – I now know that I don’t have to walk the streets of Bellavista looking for places to recycle my solid household waste. I can just keep on separating my glass, plastic, aluminum cans and know that at least in my building, these items will be recycled and used as the new raw materials for other products.

Upon further research, I learned that at least 65 condos in Santiago are involved in this initiative. Now, what about those plastic bags?

Okay, I know that some of you think that all of this may be too little, too late. True conservationists believe that real environmental protection will only happen through reduced consumption. They would have all of us “use less” and ask ourselves one basic question – what do we need it all for?

In his article, *Is Recycling Good for the Environment?*, Allan L. Griff, a consulting engineer from Bethesda, Maryland writes: “We can accept waste not, want not in principal, but can’t yet deal with drink not, use not, waste even less. We are addicted to consumption and growth and this cancer is killing us slowly.”