SWANA 2011
Special Waste Excellence Award
CleanScapes/Bike Works
Bike Recycling Program

Submitted by:
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Executive Summary

In June of 2010, CleanScapes driver Rodney Watkins became frustrated by the number of bikes he saw dumped at Seattle’s North Transfer Station. He told Chris Martin, the President of CleanScapes, that the company should do something about the volume of perfectly good bikes being land-filled every year. In response, CleanScapes chose to partner with the City of Seattle and Seattle Bike Works, a local non-profit that rehabilitates bikes for low income children, to start Seattle’s first bicycle recycling program.

CleanScapes deployed drop-boxes at Seattle’s North and South Transfer Stations, with clear signage to indicate the bike drop off location and scheduled weekly deliveries to Bike Works. Once delivered, Bike Works staff sorts through the bikes identifying those that are reparable and salvaging parts. CleanScapes transports the left-over bikes as scrap to a local metals recycling yard.

Since the program was implemented in July of 2010, Bike Works has recycled over 1,000 bikes that otherwise would have ended up in landfills. Those 1,000 bikes have gone to either low income children in Seattle and Sub-Saharan Africa, or were sold to adults to underwrite Bike Works programs.
Design of Collection Facility/Management System

Starting in June 2010, CleanScapes introduced a new collection system for bicycles at Seattle’s North and South Transfer Stations. The company deployed to each transfer station specially marked ten-yard “RE-CYCLING” dumpsters, painted bright green and emblazoned with bicycle decals. The containers were designed to be a self haul option for Seattle residents wanting to recycle their bicycles and bike parts in lieu of throwing them away. Prior to the installation of these boxes, the vast majority of bikes entering the transfer stations were simply disposed of as solid waste.

CleanScapes delivers an empty bike collection box weekly to each transfer station and hauls the full boxes to Bike Works’ warehouse in the Columbia City neighborhood of Seattle. Bike Works staff sorts through the bikes when they arrive, and nothing goes to waste. Bike Works’ staff complete an assessment for every bike, and organize each into resale, repair, donation or scrap metal recycling categories. Youth and adult volunteers of all skill levels help sort and repair broken bikes. Since setting up the boxes at the transfer stations, CleanScapes has consistently collected an average of 30-50 bikes weekly for reuse, repair and recycling. Now in its tenth month, the program has recycled over 1,000 bikes.

Bike Works has provided over 2,400 low-income youth with educational opportunities and new bikes, through time-intensive mentoring programs during the school year, and innovative summer bike repair, touring and riding opportunities. The infusion of bikes provided by CleanScapes has enabled Bike Works to expand their programs, and they recently moved into a new warehouse and workshop facility.

Bikes that are beyond repair are stripped down to the frame and placed in a roll-off container. When the container is full, CleanScapes delivers the leftover scrap metal to Seattle Iron & Metals for recycling. Because CleanScapes utilizes existing staff for container delivery and pick-up, labor costs associated with the program are limited.
Environmental Benefits & Regulatory Compliance

Since its inception Bike Works has restored approximately 1,000 bicycles, and CleanScapes has salvaged approximately 6.75 tons of steel for scrap metal. All of this material was bound for the landfill before the start of the bike recycling program—a situation that is not unique to Seattle.

Every year, millions of bicycles in the United States end up in landfills. While there are numerous programs across the U.S. and around the world that recycle bicycles, we believe that CleanScapes’ Bike Recycling program is a unique alternative because it strikes a partnership between a commercial hauler and a non-profit in dire need of bikes. We believe the program offers a simple model that can be duplicated anywhere there is a willing hauler and a non-profit dedicated to restoring and redistributing bikes.

In addition to the clear environmental benefits associated with diverting material from the landfill, this program also provides other social/environmental benefits. Along with the youth programs, a significant part of Bike Works’ mission is to increase access to bicycling. Bike Works provides a clearing house for useable bikes that people throw away when they trade up, and gets the bicycles into the hands of children or adults who can’t afford a bike. Consequently, Bike Works is meeting a community need for low-income children and adults, providing an alternative disposal option for bike owners, and hopefully is increasing the number of cyclists on the road, which improves human health and yields a green house gas reduction benefit.

While CleanScapes has piloted this program in the City of Seattle, we are working with King County to expand it to the Shoreline Transfer station, and hopefully to other King County Transfer stations. Ultimately, our goal would be to see this program integrated into the county wide solid waste management system. As CleanScapes expands, we seek to implement similar programs in the new jurisdictions we serve.

All of the sites that CleanScapes uses for this program are in compliance with local and state environmental rules and regulations. Seattle’s two transfer stations where our collection boxes are located are in full compliance with local, county, state and federal law.

“I applaud CleanScapes’ initiative in creating new opportunities for people to bike while helping meet Seattle’s waste reduction goals. As part of our zero waste initiative, the city is looking for every way to recycle and reuse items and every little bit counts.”

Councilmember Mike O’Brien, City of Seattle

Kids bikes diverted from the landfill by CleanScapes Bike Works Recycling Program.
Program Planning

One of the benefits of working for an independently owned company is that CleanScapes has the capacity to be adaptive in our decision making and can respond quickly to employee ideas or changing circumstances. The bicycle recycling program was the brainchild of CleanScapes driver Rodney Watkins who approached Chris Martin, the President of the company, to see if CleanScapes would be willing to sponsor a special recycling program. Chris embraced the idea and welcomed the opportunity to offer another reuse and recycling program to Seattle customers.

Program planning was overseen by Schuyler Charf, a staff member tasked with overseeing special projects. She contacted numerous bicycling related non-profit organizations to identify an end market for the bikes we would be collecting. Through her research she learned that Bike Works had a significant and immediate need for discarded bikes. Working with Bike Works’ Executive Director and staff she established the pick-up schedule and signage for the collection boxes.

Because of the relative simplicity of the program and the excellent planning work performed by staff at both organizations, almost no schedule or program modifications were required subsequent to program implementation. Both collection boxes are swapped out weekly. Additional pick-ups are occasionally required if boxes fill up rapidly. However, since program inception, CleanScapes has maintained an average of one swap per week per box.

For Bike Works, this program has been a boon, allowing them to expand their programs and facility. To date, they have been able to handle all of the bikes collected by CleanScapes. As we deploy additional collection boxes at other transfer stations, we anticipate increased volumes of bikes. To ensure we have a ready market for the bikes we collect, we are also building relationships with additional non-profits that perform similar work.
Performance, Economics & Cost Effectiveness

The policy objective of this program is to divert as many bikes as possible from the landfill, and to the greatest extent possible restore bicycles to sell or grant to low income children or adults. While CleanScapes does recover some cost from the scrap metal we collect, volume and prices are variable and typically cover approximately half our operating costs for the program.

The program itself was not conceived as a revenue generating measure, but rather as a way to divert bikes from the waste stream and simultaneously assist a local non-profit to meet a community need. It has far exceeded expectations in achieving that goal, and has garnered a tremendous amount of community support.

During program development, we anticipated leveraging efficiencies in downtime and back hauls from our existing fleet of roll-off trucks, and operational costs for the program have turned out to meet our projections. However, after ten months of operation we have learned that revenues are roughly half what we anticipated.

It is important to note that this is a pilot project and as we grow the program and achieve greater economies of scale, costs will likely come down and revenues increase. More importantly, this program was conceived as a way to increase waste diversion and give back to the community, while mitigating costs to CleanScapes. From that perspective, we feel that the program has been a tremendous success.
Utilization of Equipment/Systems and Technologies

This program relies on the use of our fleet of Crane Carrier/McNeilus commercial roll-off trucks. We have dedicated four ten-yard roll-off boxes for collection of bikes at the City of Seattle Transfer Stations, and back-haul of scrap metal to Seattle Iron and Metals recycling facility.
Worker Health & Safety

This program relies on our collection employees to deliver empty and haul away full drop boxes. Because the material being collected is non-hazardous — bicycles — there are no special worker health or safety issues associated with the program. CleanScapes as a company has a rigorous safety program, and has an excellent LI occurrence rating.
Public Acceptance, Appearance & Aesthetics

CleanScapes selects trucks and equipment to ensure the safety of our crews and the public, while maximizing collection efficiencies and environmental sustainability. The fleet and containers used in this program are new and always clean and presentable, because we believe that clean equipment reflects positively on our brand, on the cities we serve, and promotes pride and professionalism among our staff.

The collection boxes we use are ten-yard roll-off boxes, painted with our company colors (green and orange) and emblazoned with bike decals. We also provide additional interpretive signage on-site explaining the program, and we have a web page directing residents to the drop off locations (http://www.cleanscapes.com/resourcesbikerecycling.php).

Milestones in the program have gained earned-media coverage and serve to promote the program. Below are links to two stories related to the 400th bike we recycled, both of which were reprinted in various local and national blogs:


- **Seattle Post Intelligencer, Don’t Toss that Broken Bike**, November 9, 2010 (http://blog.seattlepi.com/thebigblog/2010/11/09/dont-toss-that-broken-bike/)

As mentioned above, this program has been remarkably well received by the public. In fact, Susan Gilmore the reporter who wrote the story about the 400th bike recycled was inundated with dozens of requests for more information about the program.
Conclusion

Unlike many of the submissions for an Excellence Award within this category, this program does not seek to address materials that are hazardous or dangerous. Rather, this program seeks to divert from the waste stream one of the simplest and most useful devices ever invented. It is a testament to the disposable nature of our modern society that so many people look at a bicycle as “disposable,” because truly they are one of the most durable and easily repairable of mechanical devices.

The collaboration between CleanScapes, the City of Seattle, and Bike Works has yielded a program that helps pull these devices out of the waste stream, put them into the hands of capable people who can repair them, and give them to low-income children and adults who need a bike. While the development and implementation of the program were not complex, the environmental and social benefits are manifold and hopefully will continue to ripple through the communities impacted by this program.

▲ CleanScapes facility in Seattle.
Bicycle Recycling

Every year, millions of bicycles end up in landfills in the US. CleanScapes and Bike Works have united to turn things around.

Do you have unused or unwanted bicycles or bike parts? You can recycle them! CleanScapes has partnered with Bike Works and Seattle’s transfer stations to create a new recycling opportunity in Seattle.

At Seattle’s North and South transfer stations look for special CleanScapes “RE-CYCLING” dumpsters, painted bright green and decorated with bicycle decals.

All of the bikes and parts collected are taken to Bike Works where youth and adult volunteers of all skill levels help sort and repair broken bikes.

The bicycles and parts support youth programs, the Bike Works’ community Bike Shop, as well as two bicycle aid programs that redistribute bicycles to Africa. Bikes beyond repair are stripped down to the frame and CleanScapes delivers the leftover scrap metal for recycling.

➤ **Seattle North Transfer Station** - click here!
   1350 North 34th Street

➤ **Seattle South Transfer Station** - click here!
   8105 5th Avenue South

Back to the Resources Main Page...

Meet Charlie!
Charlie, the son of CleanScapes’ founder, is here to answer all your questions about what to recycle and compost and how to responsibly get rid of scary things like computers or batteries. We know you have some questions. Go ahead:

➤ Ask Charlie!
Cleanscapes bike-recycling program delivers 400th to nonprofit

CleanScapes, a Seattle garbage-collection company, is working to recycle bicycles and keep them out of the landfill.

By Susan Gilmore  
Seattle Times staff reporter

A year ago Rodney Watkins, a garbage hauler with CleanScapes, pulled his truck into the North Transfer Station in Seattle and saw one of those very pricey Cannondale bicycles with all its expensive components ready to be dropped into the garbage pit.

Why should perfectly good bikes become trash, Watkins wondered. And then he remembered a movie his children had watched, “Robots,” where the chief robot’s mantra was “See a need, fill a need.”

From that grew CleanScapes’ bicycle-recycling program, which at a Tuesday ceremony delivered the 400th bike to Bike Works, a nonprofit program that repairs bikes and provides them to disadvantaged youth. Money the program earns also goes to support youth programs.

“It’s astonishing what people throw away,” said Chris Martin, president of CleanScapes, which provides garbage pickup in parts of Seattle and in Shoreline.

CleanScapes worked with Seattle Public Utilities to put containers with bicycles painted on them at the city’s North and South Transfer Stations. There is no charge to dump a bike.

Used bikes go into the containers, then to Bike Works. Those that can’t be saved are sold for scrap metal, which helps fund the recycling program.

The company plans to also put another container in Shoreline and is trying to get permission to use the county transfer station there.

Watkins, who has worked three years for CleanScapes, said that some weeks as many as 60 bikes fill the containers. As one of the containers was unloaded Tuesday, some of the bikes appeared to be almost new.

Watkins said that when he’s on his garbage route and sees a bike sitting outside for some time, he’ll leave a note asking if the owner would like to donate it to the Bike Works program.

When children outgrow their bikes, they can exchange them for larger ones through a program provided by Bike Works, said Jake Beattie, executive director.

In another program, kids learn to become their own bike mechanics by working at Bike Works, and they can earn a free bicycle, said Beattie, whose company operates in a huge warehouse in Columbia City.

It’s there that volunteers work on the bikes: Some will be sold; some donated. Last year, Beattie’s company sent 700 bikes to Ghana and South Africa.

“There’s 2,000 bikes that would have been in the waste stream we fixed,” said Beattie.

City Councilmember Mike O’Brien praised the recycling effort, pointing out the city’s goal is to take 60 percent of the waste stream out of the landfill.

“Here’s 400 bikes. Now 400 people will have a mode of transportation they didn’t have before,” he said.

Now that the bike-recycling program is well on its way, what does hauler Watkins see on the horizon?

Barbecues, he says. Many are tossed that could easily be repaired.

Joked Martin: Maybe they should start another company, Barbecue Works.

Susan Gilmore: 206-464-2054 or sgilmore@seattletimes.com
Don’t toss that broken bike

Got some junked spokes?

Instead of tossing your beat-up bike, you can take part in a new recycling program that collects old bikes, gives them a new life, and puts them back on the streets through affordable bike programs.

The best part of all? It requires minimal effort for consumers.

Two local companies, CleanScapes and Bike Works, came up with the new recycling effort, which has been in beta for the last few months and officially launched Tuesday.

Consumers can now toss their old bikes in special green-and-orange bike containers at Seattle’s two transfer stations. CleanScapes takes the bikes to Columbia City-based Bike Works, which repairs them for its youth-oriented Earn-a-Bike and Kids Bike Swap programs. The group also sells re-purposed bikes to fund its programs, which include sending bikes to Africa.

“We started this program in June, and really wanted to see how it works, and to work out the kinks before announcing it,” said CleanScapes government affairs manager John Taylor.

“We learned two things. One: There’s a big demand for bike recycling. And two: The program has worked really well.”

The effort has recycled 400 bikes to date.

Posted by Vanessa Ho