

Earth Matters

Environmental News from Pierce County

School Program Makes the Grade STUDENTS DEVELOP WAYS TO RECYCLE MORE, WASTE LESS

Students at Spanaway Junior High have been talkin' trash. They've been talkin' recycling, too, and are active participants in the county's new school recycling program.

Nine Pierce County schools are involved in the pilot program, which helps local students and staff recycle more and waste less.

At Spanaway Junior High, 20 students collected and sorted garbage from the school's 64 classrooms during a one-day audit in December. The students worked with four environmental educators from Pierce County Public Works and Utilities to assess how much recyclable material was in the school's trash bins.

"We found that only 21 pounds of recyclables had been recycled on the day of the audit, which was only 5 percent of the overall garbage samples," said Kim Meline, faculty representative for the school's new recycling committee. "I believe we could have recycled up to 70 percent of what we found."

Bob Dieckmann, an environmental educator for the Solid Waste Division, is coordinating the project with fellow educators Travis Dutton, Stephanie Leisle and Ryan Misley, and Nancy Morrison, a project coordinator in the same division. Local solid waste companies LeMay



"Recycle Man," Kodjo Awadje, helped fellow students sort trash at Spanaway Elementary.

Enterprises and Waste Connections (Murrey's Disposal and American Disposal) are helping by developing recycling programs tailored to each school's needs.

"Word has been spreading, and we're already hearing from schools who want to participate next year," said Steve Wamback, the County's solid waste administrator.

Participating schools include:

- **Bethel School District:** Spanaway Elementary, Spanaway Junior High and Bethel High School
- **Franklin Pierce School District:** Ford Middle School
- **Peninsula School District:** Evergreen Elementary, Key Peninsula Middle School and Gig Harbor High School
- **Sumner School District:** Sumner Middle School and Sumner High School

"With support from school administration and faculty, students are designing programs to cut back on how much waste they generate and to recycle as much as they can," Wamback said. "We adults have lots to learn from youth. They are showing all of us how to make garbage and disposal our last resort."

