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Otsego collects toxic waste

ONEONTA _ About 500 vehicles carrying toxic waste from 560 Otsego County households filed through lanes marked off at the state Department of Transportation work yard on state Route 7 in Oneonta on Saturday.

The turnout set a record for the annual household hazardous waste collection day, which began in 1998.

Participants generally said they were grateful for the opportunity to dispose of items that are not supposed to be put out with routine trash _ pesticides, lubricants, paint, cleaning chemical, solvents, and more.

Many of those showing up said they liked the idea of recycling.

"It's great to be recycling like this," said Helen Warncke, of Oneonta. `` It's great to have a place to take this stuff," she said.

"I like it. It's a wonderful thing to do once a year, to get this stuff out of the main stream of trash pick-up," said Les Foster, of Otego, who also commented that something about the atmosphere reminded him of the movie ``E.T."

"It's a great idea," echoed John Frankl, of Oneonta, who brought in paints.

The paints are opened on-site, stirred and poured into 55-gallon drums, and then taken to Golden Artist Colors of Chenango County, where they are remixed for distribution free of charge to local non-profits.

According to county solid waste director Terry Bliss, some 1,000 gallons of non-toxic latex paint were retrieved. Lead paint must be treated as toxic waste, but Andree Conklin, board member of the Otsego County Conservation Association, puts aside as much as she can and redistributes it to anyone needing it.

Bliss also reported that about 150 automotive batteries were collected, as well as 100 obsolete propane tank cylinders. Figures on toxic material collected will be available as soon as Care Environmental out of Landing, N.J. tallies up the numbers for billing.

"The success of the day can be credited to a large turnout of dedicated volunteers who assisted with many aspects of the day's duties, the efficiency of the Care Environmental staff, and cooperative weather," Bliss said.

Volunteers came from as near as Oneonta and as far as Nepal. Bandana Paudel and Bijaya Shrestha, Nepalese students of solid waste management at the State University College at Oneonta, worked at the paint recycling station for most of the day.

Martha Clarvoe, of the OCCA, who traditionally recruits volunteers, had help this year from Linda Drake of SUCO's Center for Social Responsibility and Community, which sent eight recruits.

Politicians were not missing. State Sen. James Seward delivered his own household hazardous waste, while Otsego County representatives Ron Feldstein, Rudy Laguna, and Marty Stayton worked as volunteers. New Lisbon town Supervisor Robert Taylor also helped out.

"I don't think I'll have to do my workout after this," Feldstein said, acknowledging the labor-intensive nature of the event.