



We're all one stream

By: Allan Gerlat

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Ecology is about how everything in our environment is interrelated and has an impact on everything else. What we do affects the environment for animals and trees, and what happens with them affects us.

So it makes sense that the people who take an active role in environmental management - from the environmentalists to public sector solid waste officials to the environmental manager at the metal goods firm - are connected more than they may think.

At last week's Wastecon show, one of the featured speakers to the group was Scott Cassel, executive director of the Product Stewardship Institute. His organization's focus is to make companies better environmental players. He acknowledged before his speech that this crowd primarily of public sector people who run the local landfill or waste hauling operation was something of a departure for him. But as he explained in his talk, the more he researched the Solid Waste Association of North America the more he realized that his organization and SWANA were pursuing many of the same goals - in a nutshell, a more environmentally responsible approach to the end-use of products and materials.

It's a healthy sign that Cassel spoke at the annual SWANA conference. There needs to be more joint discussions between the wide range of environmental organizations, general businesses, governments and individuals to help solve environmental issues. SWANA and the National Solid Wastes Management Association, the main private sector solid waste group, have had a little more exchange with each other after a frosty relationship in the past. The annual Byproduct Summit put on by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (and Waste News) brings together regulators and industry for some much-needed discussion on areas of mutual benefit rather than conflict.

It's not an easy task. The National Electronics Product Stewardship Initiative was a high-profile failure to get a lot of different stakeholders together to forge an e-recycling solution.

But everybody needs to keep at it. As Cassel said, "Let's continue the dialogue." Because it's all one waste stream. And literally, everyone is a stakeholder.

Contact Waste News editor Allan Gerlat at (330) 865-6167 or agerlat@crain.com