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Paint Exchanges Earns Innovation Award

The Village's *Great Paint Exchange* program, which allows residents to dispose of unwanted, but usable paint or take home free paint, has earned an American Public Works Association Award for technical innovation.

"I'm thrilled that Oak Park's efforts to protect the environment are being acknowledged," said Public Works Director John Wielebnicki. "It's encouraging when initiatives such as the *Great Paint Exchange* are recognized by peers in the industry as innovative and effective."

Since the first *Great Paint Exchange* in 1998, the Village has collected more than 8,000 gallons of paint and given away nearly 4,200 gallons. One year, local Girl Scouts used much of the donated paint to create a mural of a rain forest at the Wonder Works Children's Museum. The paint exchange usually is held twice a year and paint that is not given away is recycled by the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency.

The paint exchange is just one of many Village-sponsored recycling programs. Other programs have included a gasoline powered lawnmower exchange for vouchers for more environmentally friendly lawnmowers, a special bulk shredding recycling event where residents could safely dispose of personal documents and a computer recycling event funded by a grant from Dell, Inc.

In addition, the Village has brought recycling to the community's special events and festivals by providing reusable containers so that cans and bottles are no longer tossed in with the garbage.

Increased residential recycling efforts also have been implemented. About two years ago the Village replaced the familiar blue recycling bins with 64-gallon recycling containers as part of a broader program that allows residents to opt for a smaller garbage cart and pay less per month for waste hauling services. Every household received a larger recycling container, which holds about three times as much as a bin, but only those property owners who requested one got a smaller garbage cart.

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Paint exchange award
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The move to larger recycling bins coincided with steady increases in the amount of recyclables collected in Oak Park over the previous five years, and an increase in the range of containers that can be recycled. Within a year of the pay-for-use refuse hauling rate structure and distribution of the larger recycling carts, recycling increased 17 percent and garbage collections declined 5 percent.

Public Works officials say the increase may have come in part because the larger recycling carts make it easier for residents to take full advantage of the Village's "single-stream" collection approach that eliminates the need to separate recyclables.

For more information on the paint exchange or other Village recycling programs, contact the Public Works Department at 358.5700 or publicworks@oak-park.us.

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