



# Spectrum Industries Recycling

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Date: August 1, 2000  
To: Leslie Leager, DNR-Waste Mgmt Assistance Division  
From: Heidi Swets, Spectrum Recycling  
RE: SWAP Contract 00-G550-20

Attached is a copy of a newsletter to be sent to Natural Step Seminar participants summarizing the information received from those who responded to the follow-up survey.

This is also to confirm that the date of my final report is changed to August 28, 2000.

## NATURAL STEP NEWS - SUMMER 2000

Greetings TNS folks! This is the news I promised to you summarizing the implementation projects that grew out of your participation in the seminar last April as well as some miscellaneous information that may be of interest to you. Included here also are some comments from the various follow-up meetings and programs and the date of the "where do we go from here?" meeting. I hope to have learned how to use *Microsoft Publisher* by the time I send out another of these so it will be a little more newsletter-ish looking and more fun to read. I don't have the time right now to play around with it, so bear with me.

I do hope that, whether I've heard from you or not since April, the principles of The Natural Step have continued to be a presence in your thoughts. That is certainly the seed I had hoped to sow! As you can see from the following notes, most people did not undertake an actual project; they have just internalized the message and have found ways to make some more sustainable choices in their everyday lives. This is powerful! Think of all those people acting in their small ways, and what a big new way that creates.

Sustainably yours,

*Heidi Swets*

### IMPLEMENTATION PROJECTS

Out of all 72 seminar participants, only 13 implementation project summaries or comments were returned. It seemed as if the idea of a "project" was quite daunting for many, and some remarked that the survey was too detailed to fill out. After hearing this I encouraged people to simply write me about letter how TNS has changed their thinking and/or what they *anticipated* they might do someday with the ideas. That brought me 12 of the 13 returns. Many thanks to you for sending me your thoughts. 6 of the commentaries were from educators; 3 from small business folks; 3 from homeowners and one church member. Some actually completed projects; others were ongoing and the rest were waiting for the right moment.

#### Educators

##### *\*Mapping Land History—Ellen Cutting, for grades 3-5*

Ellen hopes to begin a unit with her students this Fall wherein they use the school property as a case study to look at how land use decisions affect the physical, social, biotic and cultural aspects of a community. After collecting historical information about the cultural and physical changes resulting from the development of their school site over time, they will use critical thinking skills to examine whether or not some of the decisions being made now with respect to land use in our area are sustainable. Special attention will be paid to the importance of respectfully weighing all available information before making a decision and to consideration of

long-term impacts of those decisions. The TNS system conditions will serve as a guide for evaluating choices.

***\*Infusing Concepts into Social Studies Classes - Lyle Otte, Postville High School***

Currently Lyle spends very little time in his classroom on principles of sustainability and their role in maintaining healthy human communities. In an effort to make his teaching more relevant to students' lives, he hopes this Fall to facilitate their taking on some TNS projects at school and at home that incorporate concepts of renewability, degradability, "sortability", reuse and efficiency. He hopes their projects will result in reduced consumption and waste. One of his major concerns is that he will have to fight the mainstream cultural belief "that resources will never run out."

***\*Dale Nimrod - Professor of Chemistry and Environmental Studies, Luther College***

Dale's senior seminar students were visited by Terry Gips last April, after they had already read The Natural Step for Business and their discussion was very worthwhile. Dale is reading Natural Capitalism, by Hunter and Amory Lovins and Paul Hawken and hopes to utilize this resource in his teaching.

***\*John Moeller - Luther Professor, intro Environmental Studies course***

John oversees the environmental studies minor and teaches an introductory course as well and plans to incorporate TNS in two ways: by discussing the importance of sustainability considerations in the making of public policies and (hopefully) by directing a student study group to interview a local business that has adopted TNS as a decision-making framework. The background science section of the seminar will be especially useful in providing his students with the rationale for sustainable thinking and behavior and the system conditions will be a helpful guide as they consider solutions to environmental problems.

***\*Kent Simmonds - Professor of Philosophy, Luther College***

Kent teaches an Applied Environmental Philosophy course at Luther and finds that TNS has helped him re-conceptualize the work he does both in his class, in his role as a faculty member, and in his personal life. Judging from Kent's measurement of Luther's operations against the system conditions, there are lots of opportunities for projects there.

In his Applied course, Kent's students work in a hands-on way, applying the concepts of stewardship, conservation and reclamation to real life environmental problems at the College and in the surrounding area. In essence, he envisions that the students will be working, in his class, in the "View from the Mountain top" mode: What would the College look like and how would it function if it had adopted TNS as an operational framework? The students' task then becomes: "How do we get there?" Kent desperately hopes someone will initiate a TNS taskforce at the college and involve persons from all areas of decision-making. He is also committed to making

decisions about curriculum for his courses "through a sustainability lens" and welcomes suggestions from anyone about processes or resources toward that end. The significant and sometimes overwhelming challenges he faces are the same for the rest of us—how to effect these changes when most of those around you don't share your commitment (or so it seems).

***\*Dennis Haller, Guidance Counselor/teacher at North Winn School***

Dennis has noticed a significant amount of *waste* associated with the school transportation systems—duplication of routes, wasted opportunities to serve different population's transportation needs at the same time. North Winn is about to hire both a new transportation director and a new superintendent, and when those positions are filled, Dennis would like to make better energy efficiency and accessibility as the mission of the school transportation system. This is a fine opportunity to practice "thinking out of the box" to create a rural transportation system that is much less energy consumptive.

*It seems to me that there is a real need to find a way to translate the content of the seminar, especially the science part, to elementary school language through re-vamping the words and concepts and creative utilization of some already available environmental ed programs and audiovisual resources. High school and college level educators: read Natural Capitalism, especially chapter 14. REALLY inspiring; lots of creative ideas.*

**Businesses**

***\*Larry Stevenson & Larry Grimstad, Security Bank, Decorah***

Employees at the bank have already demonstrated a strong commitment to recycling of paper and cardboard but would like to see what they can do to reduce paper use through efficiency measures and responsible paper choices. They have begun using some more environmentally friendly cleaning supplies at the bank and are looking at ways to reduce their energy use through use of photovoltaics and/or more natural lighting.

Both Larrys mentioned changes they have made in their personal lives: replacing a gas-powered lawn mower with a battery-operated one (with hopes to charge the battery with solar power); using a bicycle instead of the company car for transportation; purchasing more energy-efficient vehicles and using Amtrak instead of a personal vehicle to travel to Chicago!

***\*Dennis Pottratz, Go Solar***

As the owner of a Decorah-based solar and wind energy consulting and installation business, Dennis has taken on the task of being one of the principle organizers of the Iowa Renewable Energy Expo, to take place August 5 in Waverly. The goal of the Expo is to demonstrate the role that renewable energy can play in supplying the energy needs of Iowans through workshops and demonstrations. For years, people wanting to educate themselves about alternative energy have traveled to the Renewable Energy Fair in Amherst, Wisconsin. Now we

have a similar event much closer in Iowa! Thank you Dennis for keeping the momentum going here in Iowa!

*\*Ward Budweg, Decorah Bicycles*

Ward owns a car but doesn't use it. Instead he "walks his talk" and bicycles to work and even to Calmar or some other nearby town for an occasional meeting. He wanted to do something to both promote his business and the idea of leaving your car at home with his "Make it a Habit" project. Participants could earn \$1 per day for every day they rode their bike and \$5.00 on May 19 if they rode to work. Cooperators earned over \$1430.00 in gift certificates and found that they could save money and actually enjoy themselves too.

Ward has also replaced a substantial number of light bulbs in his store with more energy efficient compact fluorescents and is already experiencing a savings in electrical costs. His bicycle services includes a mobile component which not only results in greater customer service, but energy savings for customers and the planet alike. Technicians travel to 4 cities in the region on assigned dates providing repair service close to home for kids and adults.

Individuals/Homeowners

*\*Jenny Huang-Dale, Decorah United Methodist Church*

Jenny helped organize an Alternative Transportation Day at her church in April which encouraged members to find some way to get to church other than in their private vehicles. The response was significant ingenuity, saved gas (and pollution) and avoided wear and tear on vehicles. Jenny (and husband Greg) put a lot of thought and effort into this project, with educational posters and a map for people to indicate how far they traveled. They were careful to choose a limited duration ("low hanging fruit") project so people could have a taste of success and be inspired to continue their new behavior. She note that folks who participated realized that it is possible to share rides more often, with a minimal effort

*\*Rossmans (Decorah) and Ericksons (Canton, MN)*

Both of these families have given careful thought to choices to be made around the home-lawn care, landscaping and energy efficiency. Erickson's house incorporates passive solar design features, thorough insulation and combination LP and wood for heating. On-demand hot water and compact fluorescent lighting make for reduced electrical use, 2/3 of which is purchased from a wind source through a local electrical coop. Both have consciously reduced areas needing mowing to the bare minimum, choosing to "naturalize" the remainder of their property with trees, shrubs and wildlife plantings. Synthetic fertilizers and pesticides have been eliminated and household recycling continues.

In anticipation of building additional facilities for their home-based clay sculpture business, Kathy and Erik Erickson are going to expand on "what worked" I their house and more. Rainwater catchments for glaze and clay mixing, waste water settlement to recover chemicals in suspension, sod roofing for interior cooling, non-toxic glazing ingredients and flexible kiln sizes to

save energy during firing are all efforts to work within the system conditions. They emphasize that TNS has and continues to be an important tool for measuring their various "good ideas" against a sustainability framework.

## GOOD STUFF

If you want to learn more about what's going on in the sustainability movement, here are some things to check out:

\* **Visit the Natural Step Website at [www.naturalstep.org](http://www.naturalstep.org).** It features news of what others are doing around the country and some interesting case studies of how various groups of people (mostly in businesses or public policy situations) have used TNS as a unifying tool to empower individuals to act creatively on building sustainability into their work.

\* **Look at the magazine *Green @ Work* ([www.greenatworkmag.com](http://www.greenatworkmag.com)).** It's happening folks! There are some dedicated people out there trying to do things differently—setting necessary examples in lots of different arenas. Lots of fodder for creative thinking about ways to organize communities, businesses, buildings, developments to be more sustainable. Wasn't someone going to encourage the public library to get this one?

\* If you haven't yet, read Natural Capitalism, by Amory & Hunter Lovins and Paul Hawken. Our two-session discussion group about 4 of the chapters was minimally attended, but certainly did inspire me to read the rest of the book, which I'm doing. And chapter 14, about Curitiba in Brazil will most certainly inspire you. I've suggested to several teachers to investigate ways to use it as background reading for a critical thinking or problem solving exercise or before embarking on a community service project.

\* **Calculate your Ecological Footprint.** Use the questionnaire on the "Redefining Progress" website at [www.lead.org/leadnet/footprint/intro.htm](http://www.lead.org/leadnet/footprint/intro.htm). Users are warned that the results may be disturbing, their mental well-being may be affected and some serious thinking may be induced.

• **See the Natural Capitalism web site at [www.naturalcapitalism.org](http://www.naturalcapitalism.org).** It includes a kind of on-line discussion group about the book. I found the comments very interesting, especially those that led me to other resources.

\***Get on the list to receive the Minnesota Sustainable Communities Network e-mail updates.** Even though this originates in Minnesota, it's not only fun to see what's going on there, they report on sustainability initiatives all over the country. Having access to this sort of thing is a kind of "support system" so that people like us can better focus on what's possible, rather than what's not. Included are workshops, conferences and seminar dates of interest, initiatives, sustainability news, resource materials....Contact Philipp Muessig or Paul Moss at (800) 657-3843 or (651)296-3417 or e-mail Philip at [mnsn@mr.net](mailto:mnsn@mr.net).

## WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

At the TNS follow-up meeting held at Good Shepherd on June 13 we ran out of time to come up with a firm plan of where to go with the Natural Step in the Decorah area. We ended by agreeing to meet again "around August" to discuss only that. Some of the suggestions made were:

- have a regular monthly meeting
- have small work groups meet individually
- make sure to have newspaper coverage of what's going on
- set up an e-mail phone tree
- supply everyone with the names & phone numbers of those in the small groups
- have a quarterly meeting of everyone, with smaller groups meeting more often
- have the group be project- and goal-oriented
- make the large group meetings a learning experience with a topic or focus and a presenter

Assuming that for many of you late August will be a little hectic with classes beginning again, last minute vacations and generally switching gears into Fall, I jumped to **Tuesday, September 19 at 7pm at Decorah Public Library's downstairs meeting room as our *where do we go from here* meeting date.** Be thinking about a project the group might undertake and what you are most excited about, something that would both be a promotion of sustainability and help to increase public understanding and support for the idea. I will send you a postcard with more detail and work on what might shared at the evening to make it a learning experience. Please contact me at (319)382-2451 or [heidi@spectrum-industries.com](mailto:heidi@spectrum-industries.com) for comments or suggestions.

Meanwhile, eat lots of tomatoes!