

News Release

Everett Public Schools
February 21, 2007

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Local nonprofit collects pop bottles for school science projects

Diversified Materials Recycling in Mukilteo is saving the environment at the same time it is saving Everett School District thousands of dollars for required science projects materials. Each year, elementary science students use more than 4,000 2-liter pop bottles to build eco-columns (terrariums/aquariums) for a fifth-grade ecosystems unit. Students study the effects of various environmental conditions as they build the eco-columns. At the end of the unit, the surviving critters are returned to the science resource center for use in other classrooms, and the remains of the bottles recycled. The unit emphasizes cycles in the environment — just what using the bottles helps represent.

The cost of the bottles from bottling companies can be up to 80 cents each. Ken Storkel, Diversified's CEO has a better idea. In his not-for-profit recycling facility, workers with disabilities earn a living while learning life skills. Storkel's staff are now sorting through tons of recycled material to save 2-liter bottles, rinse them out and package them in garbage bags for school students — all at no cost to the district.

"Fifty bottles will fit into a single large garbage bag," says Shirley Maynard who works in the district's science resource center as a part of the materials management staff. With 2,000 bottles promised, and the potential for twice that amount, careful calculations about how many will fit in a bag and how much space that requires, is important. Transporting the bagged bottles takes planning too. Maynard and her husband Roger will use their trailer to pick up the bottles from Diversified and transport them to the district's science resource center at Hawthorne Elementary.

Hawthorne's basement is the warehouse and distribution center for the 614 science kits (1,143 purple crates) that are sent to classrooms throughout the district and are returned to be restocked for the next classroom use. In more than 5,500 square feet of space carved from converted lower-level classrooms, you will find items bottled and bagged, creatures wiggling or crawling, swimming or developing wings. Some materials are refrigerated or frozen; others are canned or dried. Tubs, tubes, flasks, strings, springs, screens — everything necessary to engage enquiring minds in science discovery are packed and unpacked by the materials management staff at the science resource center.

"We are so happy to get these bottles," emphasized Maynard. "But having them rinsed out means they won't even be gross for us to handle!" — a statement from a woman who works every day in a basement with cockroaches and crawdads in terrariums and aquariums.

"This is an incredibly valuable partnership," said Bob Sotak, the district's k-12 science curriculum specialist. "And it's an example of perfect symmetry. Diversified is using science to impact the environment, and its workers are learning life skills in the process. Our students are learning science and skills for their futures as well. This is recycling, learning, and partnering at its best."