

## U.S. Army Europe and 7th Army

contact: paoci@eur.army.mil  
phone: 49-6221-57-5815 / DSN 370-5815  
fax: 49-6221-57-6376 / DSN 370-6376



RELEASE #2008-04-14-02

April 14, 2008

### RECYCLING PROGRAMS PROVE SMART IDEAS, A LITTLE EFFORT CAN MAKE BIG DIFFERENCES

By Pfc. Michael Syner

U.S. Army Europe Public Affairs Office

**HEIDELBERG, Germany** -- Recycling is a concept the German community has adopted with vigor, and U.S. Army Europe and Installation Management Command-Europe officials are trying to catch up on those efforts by helping USAREUR Soldiers, civilians and family members to clean up their recycling habits as well.

“It’s costing us millions of dollars to not [recycle properly],” said Marty Hanson, U.S. Army Garrison Heidelberg Pollution Prevention Program manager.

While recycling is second nature to most Germans, Hanson said, Americans here don’t always the know-how or practice to have made sorting their waste a habit.

“I think that a lot of people that get here for the first time aren’t used to recycling,” he said.

One solution IMCOM-E officials have devised for Americans stationed in Germany is a briefing families get when they inprocess at communities across the USAREUR footprint, that explains the recycling process in detail. IMCOM-E officials are working to create a video for newcomers as well.



BRAD POSEY

1st Infantry Division Soldiers sort waste at the U.S. Army Garrison Schweinfurt recycling sort center in January. Recycling officials say the center's program of breaking down waste has significantly reduced its costs for having refuse hauled away.

“The video is going to demonstrate what wastes are recycled as [paper, plastic, etc.],” said Travis Vowinkel, the USAG Heidelberg solid waste manager.

But the video and briefing are just two of several IMCOM-E initiatives to improve the recycling rate in Europe. Vowinkle said these initiatives are tested on small populations -- usually Soldiers and their families residing in Heidelberg barracks and family housing -- before they are adopted throughout Europe.

“We have a couple of programs in place that have already helped,” he added, and cited one example. “In 2002 we installed the trash islands -- little gated areas where recycling bins are available close to homes so they’re easy to access. Almost every housing building and barracks in Heidelberg has their own island.”

The experts say recycling is the right thing to do for the environment, but recognize that it saves money, too. For example, Vowinkle said German contractors charge the Army about \$760 per ton of solid waste hauled to incinerators on the economy. That waste is supposed to include only non-recyclable items, but because some Americans forget -- or neglect -- to recycle, many items that could have been salvaged end up in those incinerators.

Just sorting trash saves the Army money that could potentially be used for other community improvements, said Roger Preciado, IMCOM-E’s Pollution Prevention Program manager.

More than 150,000 tons of solid waste was generated by the combined Army installations in Europe in fiscal year 2007, Preciado said. Of that waste, 83,193 tons, or about 55.4 percent, was recycled. The remainder that was hauled away cost the Army around \$33 million, he added.

"Our calculations show that with just a 15 percent regionwide increase in the recycling rate, we would achieve close to \$5 million in cost savings," Preciado said.

To help cut that cost and clean up a bit more, the Separate and Recycle Trash Program was created to offer USAREUR Soldiers and their families more options for disposing of unwanted recyclable and non-recyclable items.

“Sort centers are basically collection points for recyclables,” said Preciado. “They will accept anything, and will even dispose of large items like furniture.”

Sort centers have proven to be a large success. One good example is the center in USAG Schinnen, which has helped earn the community in the Netherlands the honor of being one of the top three IMCOM-E installations for recycling for the past several years, said Roger Lahaije, the community’s environmental specialist.

Lahaije said Schinnen successfully recycled 704 tons of waste last year, out of a total of more than 840 tons.

“That’s an 84 percent recycle rate,” he said.

The Schinnen program appears to be an enduring success as well, as Lahaije said there have been no changes to the community’s recycling plan in quite some time.

“Our program [has been steady] for the last five years,” he said.

USAG Schweinfurt is another community that has made great strides with its sort center.

“When I started working here three years ago, all electrical items and appliances went into a container designed for electrical scrap,” said Brad Posey, the Schweinfurt Separate and Recycle Trash coordinator. “We disposed of these items through our contractor at a cost of 60 euro per ton. We had three containers located at three separate recycle centers in the garrison, and these containers were emptied about once a month with an average total weight of four to six tons. Now we break down or take apart all electrical items and dispose of the materials separately.”

“We have reduced our costs greatly by reducing the amount of electrical waste from an estimated 10 to 15 tons every four months, to about three tons every four months,” Posey said.

Another innovative -- and highly successful -- idea tested in Heidelberg that has boosted recycling and cut costs is the reuse center, an idea Vowinkle proudly claims as his own.



PFC MICHAEL SYNER

Kathie L. Ackerman, a self-proclaimed avid user of the Heidelberg Reuse Center, looks over free items available at the center April 2.

“The reuse center is a place where families can drop off their furniture, appliances, or whatever can be used by someone else,” said Vowinkel. Anyone in the community can them come take any of these still-useable items home -- free.

The reuse center was started in 2005, Vowinkle said, to help cut back on useful items -- everything from clothing, books and DVDs to furniture and appliances -- that would have been thrown into the trash and hauled away at Army expense.

“Anyone may go and pick up whatever they like. The only thing we ask is that they sign a log with their estimate of how much their new possession would cost them if they were to purchase it,” said Vowinkel.

To illustrate the success of the reuse center, the facility’s log shows that nearly 5,000 items passed in and out its doors in February, and customers estimated that those freebies saved them a total of \$25,200. But more important than the cost savings, environmental officials point out, is that the center cuts down on environmentally-unfriendly waste

“It took off beyond my wildest dreams,” Vowinkle said. “The reuse center did so well that we hope to get more out to other garrisons.”

But Vowinkle isn’t resting on his reuse center laurels. He pointed out that USAREUR members can still do much to improve their recycling habits. Some of those changes -- such as recycling water bottles -- may seem small, he said, but make big impacts.

“One of the biggest problems we have is with water bottles. It is such a simple fix; just toss it in the proper bin,” he said.

“Recycling is important,” he added. “It helps the environment, reduces the cost for the government, and, if nothing else, it is the law in Germany.”

“Recycling is the easiest way for an individual to help protect the environment,” Preciado added. “Waste recycling plays an important role in environmental conservation, as it avoids the depletion of valuable natural resources and reduces the potential of adding contaminants in the air, soil or water.”



[www.hqusareur.army.mil](http://www.hqusareur.army.mil)