

## DEC sings praises for Devens Eco-Efficiency head Dona Neely

By Mary E. Arata, marata@nashobapub.com Posted: 02/13/2012 02:52:49 PM EST



The Devens Household Hazardous Waste Center on Cook Street opened last summer. It is one of many initiatives afoot under the auspices of the Devens Eco-Efficiency Center. (Devens Eco-Efficiency Center photo)

DEVENS - Dona Neely, Director of the Devens Eco-Efficiency Center, briefed the Devens Enterprise Commission (DEC) on Feb. 9 of the various green initiatives underway in and around the Devens Regional Enterprise Zone (DREZ). After the presentation, the commissioners heaped praise on Neely's work.

Neely reported on the "The Great Exchange" program she oversees. Through the Great Exchange, Devens businesses and non-profits swap items that have reuse potential. Neely said primarily packing material and outdated inventory was kept from landfills through the program.

Every year there's a unique challenge, she said. This year's test was to find a new home for 30 old cushions that used to line seats at the Devens Grill at Devens Common. Neely said the cushions now reside at a Nashua children's museum where the pads are used for visiting students to sit on the floor during museum programs.

With the delivery of pre-fabricated bathrooms at the new Devens Hilton Garden Inn last year, the rooms were transported to the site protected by giant tarps. Neely said 85 of those tarps were also repurposed through the program.

"Not bad," said Neely of the 50 tons of material salvaged from the waste stream this year alone.

Neely said that over the last four years, 400 tons has been salvaged on Devens through the Great Exchange program. Neely encouraged the commissioners to speak up if they saw anything they wanted to repurpose. "I'll set you up to be a treasure recipient," she said with a laugh.

White plastic buckets, wooden spools, and surplus and gently used cabling are among the items available through the Great Exchange program. Details about the program are available on the Eco-Efficiency Center's website at [www.ecostardevens.com](http://www.ecostardevens.com).

Neely said preparations are afoot for Devens Earth Day celebrations in April. Last year, 24 volunteers from seven Devens entities gathered 9 bags of trash from hiking trails and planted four gardens by the main Devens entrances, at the Sweetheart Rock and war memorial on either end of Rogers Field.

Another new feature on Devens is the regional Household Hazardous Waste collection center located behind the DPW headquarters at 9 Cook Street. Up and running for six months now, Neely admitted that's where a "majority of my time was spent last year."

The Eco-Efficiency center teamed with MassToss and nine communities in financing the start up collection center which is open 20 times a year to accept household and small business hazardous wastes by appointment. Neely said 133 full cars and 154 half full cars visited the center last year for drop offs.

In all 59 drums (55-gallons each) of household hazardous waste materials were collected and 11 boxes of paint were dropped off, along with 100 pounds of items containing mercury (mostly old batteries and light bulbs).

The center remains on budget and passed a surprise DEP inspection, Neely said. "It's been a really successful venture so far."

Neely said other towns have "expressed interest in joining," but no more have officially signed on yet. To join the cooperative, new towns must pay both an initial capital by-in sum, as well as an annual operational assessment. Visitors must also pay to drop off waste. The goal in the coming year is to install a roof over the open-air drop off center.

Next on the horizon is upping the participation in a Devens composting program. Neely said she received a DEP grant to help support 8-10 area entities establish procedures to divert food scraps from the waste stream and into a special new collection program. The scraps would be sent to a Marlborough or Westminster facility to be turned into landscaping material.

The Hilton, Devens Conference Center and Bristol-Meyers Squibb are onboard with the project. "So far, so good," Neely said.

Others in Neely's crosshairs are to "entice" the Devens Grill, Shriver Job Corps Center and the Federal Medical Center, the Red Tail Golf Club, and Dunkin Donuts.

"It's kind of a challenging sell," admitted Neely "but it will make a significant difference in the amount of waste they send to the landfill."

Neely said the institutions are familiar with sorting paper, bottles and cans. But Neely said the centers generally get excited to see the savings that can be realized when saving on the weight and volume of trucking away food waste. "It's ultimately going to save them money."

Neely said the program addresses concerns to thwart both an increase in smell and rodents. Neely said organic waste pick-ups will occur at least weekly at the outset, with plans to ramp up to twice weekly pick-ups if and when that's needed. "You'll still have the same type of trash but it won't smell differently than what your original trash smelled like."

Food scraps will be placed into 5 gallon pails and then transported into composting bins to be hauled away by E.L. Harvey & Sons waste management. Neely said there's been talk that such a composting program may be mandatory for institutional facilities by 2014, "so it's good that these entities are taking a more proactive approach."

Neely said this year's projects include a renewed focus on general waste reduction programs via a USDA grant she obtained. Neely said a program is afoot to help companies more easily dispose of wooden pallets. Neely also planned to host more educational seminars.

Commissioner James DeZutter said he's a convert, and now believes in the center's mission. "When this whole thing started, I said 'This is a good idea' but I was a bit of a skeptic. I think we have to hand a few kudos out." DeZutter thanked DEC Administrative Director Peter Lowitt, Planner Neil Angus, but reserved "a big tip of the hat" for Neely.

"At this point I'd say my skepticism is all gone and hopefully you're not planning on going anyplace soon," said DeZutter.

"Thank you as a resident and a business person," said Commissioner Armen Demerjian who lives on Devens and owns the business Eglomise Designs, Inc. on Antietam Street.