



EAGER READERS have always flocked to the magazine bin for anything from Woman's Day to 1930s cinema magazines from Czechoslovakia. West County Times archive 1993.

Timeline: El Cerrito Recycling Center 1972-2012

This timeline was prepared by Dave Weinstein in 2011 and 2012, just before the grand opening of the rebuilt El Cerrito Recycling Center. It does not include events that happened after that, though it does include one photo from 2017.

Spring 1972: About 25 people gather in El Cerrito and found a volunteer recycling group, E.C.ology. It is one of the first in the state, preceded by Berkeley, Palo Alto, Davis, and Modesto.

Early July 1972. City Councilman Gregg Cook moves that the council create an ad hoc environmental committee. It passes unanimously.

August 5, 1972: Center opens as part of city-approved "pilot project." 33 persons come by on first day.

September 1972: Pilot recycling project is so successful, E.C.ology opens recycling to everyone.

January 1973: Joel Witherell becomes city's parks and recreation director; embraces recycling while serving as liaison to E.C.ology.

August 1973: Glass crusher debuts at center thanks to \$400 lent by city.

October 9-11, 1973: California Recycling Convention, sponsored by Berkeley's Ecology Center, held in San Francisco with heavy participation of E.C.ology.

February 1974: Center repays city the \$400 it borrowed for the glass crusher.

September 1974. Hillside Park is cleaned by “Castro Raiders,” from the El Cerrito parks and recreation’s football league. Much is brought to the recycling center.

By mid- 1975: Many original founders of E.C.ology have departed, including Chris Devlin and Ken Little.

January 1976: County solid waste agency calls E.C.ology the most successful recycling center in the county.



Clever promotional efforts brought attention to recycling in the early days. This old prospector seems to be suggesting that aluminum cans are the new gold nuggets. El Cerrito Historical Society, Recycling Center Archive

December 1976: Recycling volunteers form Citizens Solid Waste Advisory Committee and propose that the city plan to recycle 25 percent of its waste. Group plans a curbside program.

January 1, 1977: E.C. ology expands from two Saturdays a month to every Saturday.

March 1977: E.C.ology and the Association of Bay Area Governments co-sponsor a regional conference, “Garbage – Trash or Treasure?”

May 1977: City Council forms an Environmental Quality Committee to “advise on solid waste and other environmental issues,” and authorizes applying for a \$90,000 state grant and federal CETA funding for recycling.

June 1977: City gets the state grant – but only for \$45,000. It’s split between El Cerrito and Santa Rosa. CETA approval follows.

July 1, 1977: City takes over operation of recycling center, with council adopting the goal of reducing land-filled waste by 25 percent. Center expands from Saturday only to 5 days a week and begins buying aluminum thanks to Kaiser Aluminum’s “Can-Do” program.

September 6, 1977: First day of curbside collection for residents who pay to subscribe.

September 28, 1977: First truckload of aluminum, 13,228 pounds, is delivered to Kaiser plant in San Jose.

May 1, 1978: Subscription fee for curbside pickup ends; curbside is now free for a 3-month “trial” run. Volume more than quintuples in first week.

July 1, 1978: Center expands its buyback program beyond Can-Do, buying glass, tin, aluminum, newspaper.



Dignitaries including City Council members Jean Siri and Bob Bacon, citywide garage sale promoter Marianne Hegeman, Joel Witherell, recycling worker Jose Jaramillo, and others celebrated at the recycling center in the mid 1980s.
El Cerrito Historical Society, Recycling Center Archive

July 1978: Pole barn erected at recycling center.

1979: Angry protests at City Council meetings by neighbors because of the noise and trash from buyback program.

1979-1981: Major expansion in El Cerrito's recycling program includes curbside pickup in Kensington, site improvements, new equipment and trucks, and satellite drop-off centers in Pinole, San Pablo and other nearby cities.

1981: Buyback program ends at E.C.ology center because of neighborhood impacts, shifts to West Berkeley. But threatened closure of the recycling center is averted.

December 1982: Council enacts mandatory surcharge of 40 cents/month on garbage bills to fund recycling and establishes an enterprise fund for recycling.

December 1984: Mandatory surcharge ended by a 3-2 vote of council, replaced by voluntary 50 cent fee.

September 1, 1987: California Beverage Container Recycling and Litter Reduction Act ("The Bottle Bill") goes into effect, creating redemption centers where people can sell their containers. It has little negative effect on E.C.ology.

1988: Policymakers throughout the Bay Area worry about the "garbage crisis" as landfills fill up, bringing increasing attention to recycling.

January 1989: Three El Cerrito parks, Harding, Cerrito Vista, Arlington, get recycling bins thanks to a \$13,434 state grant.

1989: Recycling center drops the name "E.C.ology," in favor of "El Cerrito Recycling Center."

1989: California Resource Recovery Association names El Cerrito's center the "Best Drop-off Center" in the state.

1989. City re-establishes a mandatory fee to subsidize recycling.



Green buckets for glass and cans were distributed to homeowners to encourage participation. El Cerrito Historical Society, Recycling Center Archive

September 1989: Recycling center distributes two green buckets to every home in town to encourage recycling, thanks to a \$45,000 grant. Participation soars.

January 1, 1990: AB 939, the state Integrated Waste Management Act, sets deadlines for cities to divert first 25 percent, then 50 percent of their trash from the landfill.

April 1990: Volunteer Marianne Hegeman, working with the recycling center, puts on the first El Cerrito citywide garage sale, a tradition that continues today.

May 1990: City uses \$21,000 state grant to buy wheeled recycling carts for apartments and condos.

1990: El Cerrito uses both the carrot and the stick to boost recycling participation, raising garbage rates by one dollar a can to encourage people to switch from two cans to one, and offering a mini-can with a lower rate to encourage people to recycle even more.

October 1990: At the urging of Maria Castellano, a student and commuter, El Cerrito sets up recycling bins at its two BART stations – the first such bins in the BART system.

September 1992: Students return to school to find recycling bins at every school in town, thanks to the recycling center and funding from Soroptimist International of El Cerrito.

1993: Joe Witherell, who ran recycling in El Cerrito since 1977 and was deeply involved from 1973, retires.

April 1994. Integrated Waste Management Task Force ponders the future of recycling in the city in light of increasing recycling efforts region-wide.

1995: Waste Task Force proposes that city continue to operate its own drop-off center but consider letting East Bay Sanitary handle the curbside pickup.

September 1996: City Council adopts most of the Task Force recommendations, including adding green waste collection to curbside and accepting additional items curbside. City crews continue to operate curbside pickup.



The Recycling Center was an industrial operation until city manager Scott Hanin decided to have others handle most processing activities elsewhere. El Cerrito Historical Society, Recycling Center Archive

1997: City reaches the state-mandated year 2000 goal of diverting 50 percent of its waste from the land fill three years ahead of time because of its green waste collection.

March 31, 1997: City shifts to curbside pickup of garbage on same day as recycling pickup. Wheeled green waste and garbage containers are distributed to all households.

2000: Recycling Task Force considers whether city should reconstruct its derelict pole barn and whether the recycling center should remain open.

2001: Scott Hanin, who had worked in solid waste and recycling for 14 years, becomes El Cerrito's city manager and quickly makes changes in recycling operations to improve safety and efficiency. Eventually, most processing ceases at the drop-off center.

2002: Task Force recommends that the city continue to collect materials that are separated by homeowners, that the city continue to run its recycling center, and that the planned rebuilding of the recycling center proceed. The first two recommendations are followed; the third is not.

2008: El Cerrito merges its recycling, climate change, water quality and similar functions into a new Environmental Services Division.

2009: City switches how it collects materials curbside, from separate materials in separate bins to one large wheeled cart for mixed materials.



Recycling manager Garth Schultz speaks during a 2017 Historical Society program at the Recycling Center. Behind him are Allan Gardiner, who built the first glass crusher, and Tom Padia former assistant manager at the recycling center.
Photo by Dave Weinstein

2010: City begins to collect Styrofoam at its drop-off center but not curbside, one of the few centers to handle this material. It already collects plastic film and mixed hard plastics of all sorts at the drop-off.

Spring 2011. Reconstruction of the recycling center gets underway. The pole barn is demolished.

Late winter-early spring 2012: City plans to open its all-new recycling center with a “soft opening” followed by grand celebrations.