

**By Carolyn Lee**

**The Imperial Republican**

While cities across Nebraska are re-evaluating their recycling programs, in light of a depressed economy and low prices for recycled material, Imperial City Clerk/Administrator Jo Leyland is optimistic about the future of the city's program.

Some cities are stockpiling recyclables until prices improve. Recycling companies are also waiting for prices on copper, paper and aluminum to increase before selling or buying.

The Imperial program, which is sponsored by the city of Imperial, chugs on nevertheless. Prices are not good, but Leyland said recycling sees a cyclical pattern of up and down prices every so often.

"Sometimes people call me to buy materials," she said. "All have told me that after the first of the year it (recycling prices) will start up again."

Leyland added that one of the factors in the low prices being paid is that there is a stockpile of materials not in the market.

At present, the only materials the city sells are newspaper and paper products. Leyland shops around to different recyclers to get the best price.

Most of the sales go to First Star Fiber of Omaha or MDK Recycling of New Hampton, Iowa.

Leyland said that when a semi truck arrives to load the paper, the city adds cardboard to the load. Cardboard isn't selling at present, according to Superintendent of Public Works Pat Davison.

A semi load of paper nets the city between \$1,000-1,500, Leyland said. The cost of shipping is taken out of the total price paid to the city.

Glass collected by the city is ground up in a grinder, then used in trenches or ditches, Davison said, or given to people for their driveways.

Leyland said she's used crushed glass in between flagstones on her patio.

She also said the city has combined crushed glass with sand for use on snowy roads in town.

The glass won't cut tires, she noted. The idea behind combining glass with sand is that the glass reflects the sun and is supposed to make the snow melt more quickly. Leyland said the city isn't sure if this is true.

Plastics are currently being shredded and hauled to Kearney, but aren't generating any income.

Steel is hauled to Ogallala, and is not normally a lucrative item, Davison said.

Aluminum is not a big recycling item for the city, as most people elect to sell it by themselves.

The city gets rid of the glass, plastic and steel, even without selling it, because there is only one storage site, and room is scarce, Davison said.

When asked if the program pays for itself, Leyland said, "If you figure in the cost of not taking it to the landfill, and the environmental cost of not making a bigger mountain out there, I think it's worth it."

Davison had no comment on his opinion of the feasibility of the program.

"If you figure in the labor time and transportation, it probably doesn't (pay)," Leyland said.

There's another consideration besides environmental, though. Before the city initiated the program, persons generating trash were charged a flat rate. Leyland said that wasn't fair, when comparing a single elderly woman with a family of six paying the same rate.

She said people needed an alternative to a flat rate.

When the city first began recycling, about 1989, it was a voluntary program. Then the city switched to a volume-based trash program, where "The more you throw away the more it costs,

and recycling really took off,” she explained.

Leyland said she doesn't look for the recycling program to change. “It's a value to the community. People use it extensively,” she said.

**Cats a problem**

Cats are still a big problem at the recycling center on East Hwy 6-61. Leyland wrote a Letter to the Editor in The Imperial Republican recently, detailing the problem.

People are dumping cats and kittens off at the center, feeding them and even providing them bedding.

“We're not equipped to care for animals out there,” Leyland stated. “We are not in the humane society business.”

She asks people to not contribute to the problem. They're not benefiting the cats by encouraging them to live at the center.