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**Current Status of the Recycling Association of Minnesota’s “Its In The Bag “program as of March 2017.**

Brita Sailer, Executive Director of the Recycling Association of Minnesota.

In response to the growing challenge of waste plastic bags and shrink film in retail and commercial sectors, as well as with materials management at recycling and solid waste facilities, the Recycling Association of Minnesota initiated a program in 2007 which began as a community partnership relying on businesses and residents alike.

The Recycling Association of Minnesota provides collection containers for small to medium sized businesses which produce shrink film as a waste material and who do not have another recycling option readily available to them. Most waste haulers do not accept shrink film or plastic bags for recycling. The businesses collect stretch wrap and other plastic film waste generated on-site. Some businesses, particularly retailers, have chosen to provide the very popular service of a collection bin for their customers to drop off plastic bags and other related materials.

All the materials are then collected, sorted and recycled by adults with disabilities employed at local vocational centers throughout Minnesota. This program has been able to provide these individuals with employment opportunities and can augment the training programs in place at the vocational centers. The program was also designed to reduce business waste disposal fees for participating businesses, while providing a recycling option for certain film plastics which generally could not be recycled.

When the market prices for these plastics began to fall in 2012, the revenue generated through the program, due to a variety of circumstances including transportation and labor related costs, was in many cases, despite a small pick-up fee charged to the businesses, insufficient to cover the expenses incurred by the vocational centers. Some vocational centers such as the Eagan based Pro-Act, and the St. Cloud based organization, WACOSA, which continue this program today, are centrally located and close enough to the pick-up locations for the program to remain viable. The Recycling Association of Minnesota will continue to work with any vocational centers that choose to keep the program.

It is unfortunate that most other vocational centers have had to discontinue their participation in the Its In The Bag program. The combination of the drop in market prices for the plastic, transportation and labor costs for the collection and sorting of the material, and program changes within the vocational center/ Day Training and Habilitation structure have resulted in a gap once more in recycling options for these plastics around the State of Minnesota.

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