

newsletter

January 2010

Vol. 2 Issue 11

The Other Black Gold—Biochar

Scientists believe that Biochar could be just thing to help reduce one of our major greenhouse gases, carbon. What is Biochar? It is the black charcoal remnants of plant matter (ie.forest debris and crop leftovers) heated with minimal oxygen. The process used to produce Biochar also collects the smoke and its by-products to create bio-oil, a liquid that can be used for fuel. Biochar is a soil amendment for crops or revegetation efforts that increases soil fertility by sequestering atmospheric carbon. The whole process is considered to be *carbon-negative* which means biochar does not emit carbon and it extracts carbon from the atmosphere. To learn more about this old substance and process (originating from the Amazon) visit <u>www.biochar.org</u>.

Your Question Here:

What are the facts surrounding glass recycling in Utah?

From Robin: "I've read in an article not too long ago that the reason Draper doesn't bother to offer glass recycling with any degree of convenience is due to the fact that it's carbon negative. It mentioned that all glass in the county is loaded and trucked to California due to there being a market for the glass there and not here. The Draper city councilman noted that the carbon impact was negative for doing so therefore, there was less impact with not recycling the glass than to recycle it. Does any of this ring true?"

The truth to Robin's comments is that creating a recycle system for a city can be daunting to implement. Many cities in Utah do not offer glass recycling, but small glass recyclers do exist in the Salt Lake area. Providing a recycling service could be a costly and unpredictable endeavor because local sources may not be able to handle the volume of glass generated throughout the whole of Salt Lake Valley. The lack of demand for glass by industry in Utah leaves do-gooders to ship the glass out of state, bringing questions of increased carbon impact on the environment. Without knowing the amount of glass shipped, nor the type of transporting vehicle, its mileage, fuel usage, and frequency of shipments it would be difficult to give a definitive answer on the true carbon emissions compared to the reduction in emissions from recycling the glass. These are all factors that businesses and municipalities would have to consider before a carbon impact ruling is made. If it were "carbon- negative" as the Draper Councilman noted, cities would only gain support for glass recycling because that term means to decrease carbon in the atmosphere. Though glass recycling is not carbon-negative, it is hoped to be carbon-neutral and there are undeniable benefits:

- 1. Less waste in the landfill, less greenhouse gases (GHGs) emitted
- 2. Less glass in the trash means less waste to pay for-saving money
- 3. GHG emissions are reduced at some point no matter the process
- 4. Recycled glass "costs less than raw materials" for factories to work with because "it melts at a lower temperature, which demands less energy from power sources like...coal, and less energy used means reduced emissions of...GHGs" (http://www.epa.gov/waste/conserve/materials/glass.htm).

Currently the only glass recycling program open to the public is Salt Lake City's (SLC) free drop-off sites. We spoke with Bridget Stuchly, Outreach Coordinator for SLC's Green e2 Business, on what happens to the glass after it is dropped off. She informed us that <u>all</u> of the glass collected is recycled and <u>none</u> of the glass is allowed to enter landfills because they only contract with reputable services based upon those requirements. All blue, green and clear glass goes to a local source that cleans and crushes the glass for resale and all brown glass is transported to Colorado to be recycled. The shipping does emit GHG emissions, but SLC believes it to be more pertinent to recycle the recovered glass than placing it in the landfill. SLC is always open to improvement including keeping their brown glass in state if local demand becomes available. Their latest endeavor is implementing curbside glass recycling for some downtown businesses. If this program goes well there is great potential on expanding it in the future.

There are also other service opportunities for businesses and residents to recycle glass on their own. Alta Ski Area, along with other Alta residents and businesses, started recycling glass in 2009 with a local glass recycle service—Glass Planet, who takes all the glass to a local glass dealer—American Specialty Glass. All good things must start somewhere and for those who are devoted to recycling, you can find a way. If you are interested in recycling glass for your business or residence, you can contact SLC Green e2 (www.slcgov.com/slcgreen/) or Momentum Recycling (www.momentumrecycling.com/) or The Recycling Coalition of Utah (utahrecycles.org/index.php) for information on recycling in your area. To find out where you can drop off your glass free in SLC visit one of these sites: www.slcgov.com/slcgreen/recycle/glass.htm or www.recycle.slco.org/items/glass.html.