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Interview with David McMahon, Cloudburst Recycling, 2009 (audio)

David McMahon

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**PORTLAND STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY
PROJECT
INTERVIEW INDEX**

INTERVIEWEE: David McMahan

Interviewer: Allison Dowd

Date: 11/19/2009

Location of Interview: Cloudburst

Recycling

Research Assistant: Angelina Yzaguirre

Interview Series: SUSTAINING NORTHWEST LANDSCAPES & COMMUNITIES

Recording Equipment: DIGITAL RECORDER (WINDOWS MEDIA AUDIO FILE)
WITH AN

EXTERNAL, OMNIDIRECTIONAL MICROPHONE

Time	Notes
4:22:23	David went to Reed College during the Vietnam era and studied philosophy, sociology and then branched into economics
4:21:15	This is the time when he studied social change into action, had more interest in economic and political change, but environment was more necessary
4:20:28	Worked with and began with Sunflower Recycling. David with Cloudburst shared the same warehouse, equipment, etc. David thought this would be a short term project but turned into long term, he's still at Cloudburst today.
4:18:45	When began Cloudburst and working in Portland, there was virtually no collection services at the time, there was only community activists. A lot of interests in the area, but collection agencies thought it was economically unviable. There were really only markets for recycling of paper and

	cardboard products.
4:16:52	During that time, it was more of a niche recycling for who could do it and wanted to put the effort in.
4:15:25	David was part of the Portland Recycling Team that helped open markets. This was more of an economic outlook on things, cannot recycling anything without an end user, costs, products, and profit.
4:14:25	As more mills change equipment to use recycling feed stocks, there is more support and accommodation for the markets.
4:11:11	Talking about Portland's bubble outlook on recycling – Always comparing with San Francisco and actually, SF is doing better right now, same with Seattle. They both have higher diversion rates. Portland tends to be self-complimentary even when the city is really not ahead of the rest of the United States on such things like recycling.
4:7:45	There seems to be a loss of awareness of what really is being recycled with comingled recycling. It used to be forced on employees to inspect every tub that was collected and now, sometimes, the lid isn't even flipped until it gets to the sorting line. And in the sorting line, there can never be flawless inspection.
4:5:40	Cloudburst has been trying to recycle cooking oil through the community, more of an economic motivation stemmed from environmental motivation. Using the oil to Cloudburst's benefit by converting it to biodiesel for the trucks that are used in collecting recycling and decreasing their own carbon footprint. This has not necessarily financially paid off at this point, it is more of a good practice for the company.
4:3:55	Sustainability: Hard to think any industrial lifestyle is sustainable. Recycling is more of a vital act to declare/foster awareness of environmental impact, from the saying, "treads lightly on the planet". Right now, Cloudburst is not close to that what with all the resources, computers, trucks, etc. being used for the business.
4:01:32	Sustainability is more than just recycling and waste reduction. Things such as telecommuting, living close to where an individual's workplace, it's the

	little things that help get closer.
4:00:00	Biggest obstacle in Oregon's success in recycling is the program costs. People are reluctant to commit because of money issues. Also, it is the product's design in the first place. Some products are inherently impossible to recycle.
3:57:25	Green Dot – In theory, in the United States, this could work. But when do you consider products to be truly recycled? This is a chain of command issue. There is no way to really follow up on materials; tracking is therefore a large issue.
3:49:00	Regulators really can't do anything that the big companies object to, it should be the other way around.
3:44:20	Before 1985, there was an inefficient collection system. Prior to garbage franchising, it was hard to get politician's priorities to agree with recycling efforts. Earl Bloomenhaur helped to accomplish community's environmental goals and collaborate for residential collection services. This is the same situation in commercial industry, it needs to be created. Even if this is not the most efficient way, there needs to be a way to break even.
3:40:11	It is hard for Cloudburst Recycling to bid against waste management.
3:37:42	Challenges in business: Unregulated operating environment, every level of ethical commitment is at play. It is hard to keeping going through generations (environmental values).

Time	Notes
3:33:24	Interesting experience over the years: Exciting to have people from all over the world interested in Cloudburst's practices. They had the first truck design that included separate places for the separate recycling.