



Montclair hair salon tries out green recycling methods



*Bangz staffers Andy Tipton and Annie Semmel stand next to boxes of human hair, foil, hair product containers and other items awaiting shipping out for recycling.*

*PHOTO BY ERIN ROLL/STAFF*

**By ERIN ROLL**

[roll@montclairlocal.news](mailto:roll@montclairlocal.news)

Upstairs at Bangz Salon on South Fullerton Avenue, you'll find three large cardboard boxes filled with trash awaiting shipping. One contains a large bag of hair sweepings from the salon floor. Another contains discarded foils, used color tubes and excess hair color from color treatments. Items previously ending up in the landfill or washed down the drain, will be sent off for recycling or repurposing.

Bangz signed up with Green Circle, a Canada-based organization that helps hair salons recycle their waste products.

Hair sweepings are sent to women's prisons, where they are made into "hair booms:" large sponges that are used to help soak up oil from oil spills or to make mattresses. Foils and color tubes are recycled into items such as bicycle frames. Even the unused hair dye can be repurposed into a type of fuel.

Stylist Andrew Tipton was worried that the salon's waste products were going into the garbage or being washed down the sink and how much during the average week. During a recent performance review, Tipton brought up his concerns over the salon's waste with the salon's owners.

"Andy, go do your research and come back when you find something," the owners said, according to Tipton.

Bangz started with Green Circle on April 1. The salon's 30 or so stylists underwent training on how to dispose of waste products.

In the dispensaries - the rooms off the main salon floor where colors are mixed — there are labeled cardboard boxes where stylists can deposit excess pigment. Previously, that excess color pigment would have just been washed down the drain, a fact that didn't sit well with Tipton.

The week before, there had been four or five bags of leftover hair color that needed to be disposed of, salon manager Annie Semmel said. But last week, as of Friday, there hadn't been any.

"The visual of all the bags was kind of a 'wow' moment," she said.

Semmel and Tipton said that the stylists have also been rethinking how much color they measure out and mix for each client. " 'Do I need two scoops or just one?'" Tipton said.

They concurred that reducing the amount of color used for each customer would save the salon some money on having to buy new color tubes.

Recycling hair is particularly impactful because hair doesn't decompose and the salon produces a lot hair waste.

There are some costs involved. It costs the salon about \$2,500 a month to send out the boxes for disposal.

The salon will be holding a tour on Earth Day for other salon owners in the area.

Founded in 2009, Green Circle officials said the company has helped divert 5.3 million tons of hair salon waste, including aerosol cans, hair sweepings, color pigment and color tubes, from landfills. There are at least 2,077 Green Circle salons in the United States and Canada, including at least 11 salons in New Jersey.

Green Circle came into being, according to media reports, after the founders learned how much garbage was being generated by salons in the Toronto area, where Green Circle is now based.

American Association of Cosmetology Schools Member Lynelle Lynch said her school, Bellus Academy, signed on with Green Circle a year and a half ago after learning about it at a professional convention for cosmetology professionals. "I think they're really on to something," she said of Green Circle.

Besides recycling, Bellus Academy has also switched to low-flow water fixtures in its hair washing sinks, Lynch said.

"It is a good idea for students to learn about eco-friendly methods of disposing of salon waste, so that they would be familiar with them by the time they went to work in a salon full-time," she said.

And, she added, it's also important to get customers to understand how a trip to the salon could affect the environment.