

Letters from MRFY - SPECIAL EDITION - SPAZZINO

March 1, 2024

This Garbologist was fortunate enough to spend a week in the far-off and distant land of Italy. Home to emperors and kings, popes and paupers, and for some reason, cats of all shapes and sizes. Not only was it a feast of sights and sounds and tastes, but the MRF man deep inside had to take a look at the trends in garbage and recycling. The Italian word for Garbage Man is SPAZZINO and honestly it's not the first time I've been called a spazz.



Venice was a wonder for its small, cramped back alleys and Mainstreet waterways. Waking up at the Hotel Antica Locanda Al Gambero, I was fortunate enough to be a block from San Marco Square. I threw open the shutters pre-sunrise and watched the first rays of the sun glint off the spire of St. Mark's Campanile and the golden weathervane of the Archangel Gabriel. The anticipation of this scene was suddenly shattered with the low hum of a diesel engine and the sounds of yelling echoing through the canyons of this historical morning ... HOW? WHO? Why?? Perfectly enough, it was the garbage man and his garbage barge coming through the streets early. It was my brethren. My Kin. The Brotherhood of trash collectors come to remind me that waste never sleeps, and neither rain, sleet nor snow will stop the garbage man from collecting. In my mind, I interpreted these loud and boisterous Italian phrases to translate to "Bring out your trash!! Bring out your trash!" and a brief Monty Pythonesque flashback. I gazed down to the morning water below and saw this beautiful green barge rolling by. It made a stop before my hotel, collected and stowed the bags below, and then moved further down the line to collect -- all the while, the low rumble of a diesel engine gurgling and pushing my brothers-in-arms down the alley. I smiled and went back to pre-garbage collecting bliss.

Venice is not unlike Madeline Island. Everything arrives by water and must leave by water: groceries, mail, packages, trash and visitors. Although they do have interconnected bridges connecting the main port of entry to the rest of the island, the dominant form of transportation is a free public water-taxi system supported by private haulers. It's a sight to behold, and the streets of Venice are clean and free of refuse and strangely ... no plastic in sight. Including on my cappuccino. I must admit: Italian coffee is far superior to American brands and methods of preparation. Not only in flavor but temperature and, of course, how it is presented. There are very few people using plastic lids for "takeaway coffee" (there is no To-Go; everything is takeaway). They use paper lids and it made the notion of me drinking (no exaggeration) 55 cappuccinos/American coffees/espressos/affogatos considerably less guilt-laden. It was truly eye opening given that, here at the MRF, we deal with a LOT of plastic coffee lids. Each year in America, we throw away 2,000,000 cups a day. In Italy, they recycle them. At the MRF, we will recycle the lids as #2 plastic and paper cups in paper. I did not see ONE Styrofoam cup while in Italy. Stop using Styrofoam.



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The streetside collection units are well designed and manage to offer the consumer a variety of options for disposal. Organics include food waste and disposable wooden forks. Paper is not delineated from cardboard, and it all goes in one bin. Plastic is not separated and is placed in a unified bin and everything else is “indifferent” or “if it doesn’t fit in the other bins put it here.” I didn’t see a lot of metal cans being used or disposed of and rates of cross-contamination were minimal. It seems national pride at making the recycling program a success has taken hold. I know you’ve heard me banter on and banter on about it, but the bulk of the success for recycling begins at home with effective presorting. Bringing full bags of recycling and sorting in line and calling this “presorting” is NOT effective. (YOU KNOW WHO YOU ARE). Let’s do better this year, shall we?

Venice and Rome were models of efficiency for recycling and garbage collection and, although my view was limited to what I could see from the street view, it was surprisingly clean and well managed. Napoli.... Not so much. I am not sure where the breakdown in process happens, but Naples was a garbage man nightmare. The streets are paved with plastic and litter. Garbage bins are full and overflowing with solid waste and recyclable material. There were no public disposal units, and it was unfortunate because the city is beautiful. However, taking a 30-minute drive outside of the city to Pompeii and its surrounding villages, it is



exemplary in terms of messaging and clarity. “Take care of the Earth and it will take care of you!” and “No Water No Life - No Blue No Green” and my favorite “Recycle the Present - Save the Future - Live the Past” is applicable to the rich history of Pompeii as it

is to Madeline Island-Mooningawanakuaning.



All is all, it was a treat to be able to not only to visit Italy but to be able to see how people are managing the same challenges with waste and recycling that we are. There could be some changes in messaging for our public disposal units in order to make it more efficient, and I may incorporate a few more Italian phrases into my recycling lexicon at the drive-through. Either way, it will be a treat to see you here at the MRF and assist you.

Preordina il tuo riciclaggio. Grazie mille. (Pre-sort your recycling. A thousand thanks.)

ADDENDUM - Metrics and Mayhem



For the month of February, the MRF processed 2,273 lbs. of cardboard, 556 lbs. of aluminum, 680 lbs. of #1 plastic, and 1,258 lbs. of paper.

We had small MRF miracles happening this past month. Michael and I prepared our stockpile of 50 autos. We drained fluids and pulled the catalytic converters and waited for the arrival of the Duke of Demolition!! THE CAPTAIN OF CAR-NAGE... the Master of DISAAASTER ... the SULTAN OF SMASHY SMASHY ... MR EVAN ERICKSON to come in and work his magic. (CROWD GOES WILD!!!)

LIFTING VEHICLES INTO POSITION TO DRAIN FLUIDS



REMOVING TIRES



SMASHY SMASH!! Corporal Crusher does the deed! All in all, we will haul 6 boxes of autos at around \$150/ton. The total for the auto project will be included in next month's report.

We are once again collecting autos!! Stay tuned!!