

Air Force observes 24th annual America Recycles Day

**By Jennifer Schneider
AFCEC/CZTQ**

The Air Force joined the rest of the nation in observing the 24th annual America Recycles Day Nov. 15, recognizing the environmental and economic benefits of recycling.

For the Air Force, which diverted 143,655 tons of material from landfills in fiscal 2019, every day is recycling day. In addition to the 143,655 diverted tons, the Air Force also took steps to divert 89 percent of its construction and demolition debris from landfills.

“Successful recycling and solid waste diversion efforts at installations across the enterprise underscore the Air Force's commitment to environmental stewardship,” said William Ryan, chief of the Air Force Civil Engineer Center Environmental Management Directorate's Operations Division. “Installations capitalize on waste diversion to generate funds through their qualified recycling programs and save money on waste disposal expenses.”

Joint Base Langley-Eustis, Virginia, is one installation reaping the benefits of recycling.

Environmental staff with the 733rd Civil Engineer Division at Eustis partnered with a plastic composite manufacturer in 2018 to launch a six-month plastic collection competition among installation units. Units collected plastic bags, film and other wrapping materials that would have otherwise been discarded as trash.

“Plastic bags are particularly nasty for the environment,” said Art Silver, an environmental management system subject matter specialist for the Air Force Civil Engineer Center's JBLE installation support team. “They're commonly used but are difficult to recycle due to their thin shape and tendency to become airborne. They also endanger aquatic wildlife.”

As an additional incentive for the competition, the company offered JBLE a plastic composite bench if at least 500 pounds were collected over a six-month period.

The initiative was so successful that the base is now in its fourth six-month drive, turning in over 2,500 pounds of plastic and earning three benches for installation use.

“It has been an all-around homerun,” said Donna Haynes, 733rd CED environmental protection specialist. “We started it in 2018 as a way to do something different for America Recycles Day and it has really taken off from there.”

The installation has collected so much, they are looking at now selling the collections as income for their qualified recycling program.

“In addition to the numbers for the bench competition, we have also been collecting and storing baled plastic for future sale, totaling 4,275 pounds to date,” said Joanna Bateman, 733rd CED pollution prevention and planning team lead. “We hope to see an increase in these numbers based on recent updates to our environmental management procedure for contracting – environmental special conditions...language to be included in all contracts awarded on the

installation which requires contractors to collect and turn in these plastics and wraps to our Solid Waste and Recycling Center.”

The goal is to collect 15 bales’ worth, at 1,400 pounds per bale. At that point, recycling vendors deem it cost-effective to pick up and pay for the material.

By recognizing these successes, the Air Force promotes its commitment to reducing, reusing, recycling and 'rethinking' how it looks at solid waste management across the force.