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Keesler's recycling program turns 2011 trash into treasure

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by Susan Griggs
81st Training Wing Public Affairs

1/25/2012 - **KEESLER AIR FORCE BASE, Miss.** -- Keesler's aggressive recycling program returned \$176,322 in proceeds to the base by diverting nearly 40 percent of its waste from landfills in 2011.

Keesler began 2011 with a 25.4 diversion rate and proceeds of \$27,208 in the first three months of the year, said Doug Smith, Keesler's project manager for Zero Waste Solutions/ Mark Dunning Industries. The amounts rose steadily as the year progressed, and by the final quarter of the year, the diversion rate more than doubled to 56.12 percent and the proceeds jumped to \$70,100.

Air Education and Training Command's annual diversion goal for 2011 is 40 percent and increases to 50 percent in 2015.

Smith is proud of the base's accomplishment, but is already eyeing additional ways to make "reduce, reuse, recycle" a stronger commitment in the future.

One of the most successful diversionary tactics has been a concerted effort to reuse items rather than dispose of them in a landfill.

"During 2011, we made donations to local churches, schools and organizations like the American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars, as well as sold some items to private individuals," Smith explained.

When Keesler remodels dining halls, offices and other spaces and furniture and equipment are no longer needed, the Defense Reutilization and Marketing System headquarters at Eglin Air Force Base, Fla., is contacted. If DRMS deems items "scrap" because it's not economical to transport them, the base tries to find ways to reuse and donate items because of limited storage space.

"It's hit or miss when these things come in," recycling specialist Duane Olsen pointed out.

"We don't know when or what items are going to show up and we can't help every nonprofit organization with its needs, but we'd much rather donate than discard."

Another recycling effort has been to shred the hard drives from outdated computers and send other components to a women's prison in Mariana, Fla., where precious metals, plastic and aluminum are stripped and recycled.

For more information on furniture and equipment donations, call 228-377-4546.

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