

ST. JOHN TRADEWINDS

Recycling of Plastics Begins on St. John

By Amy H. Roberts

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Island Green Living Association has good news for people who hate to throw a single-use plastic container in the trash, knowing it's one more object that it could take decades – if not centuries – to break down in the Bovoni Landfill. Or worse, wind up in the ocean.



Island Green Living Association staff hold up plastic containers that can be recycled. From left: Kelly McKinney, Anthony Novelli, Kat Bodish, and Kobe Liburd. (Photo submitted by Island Green Living Association)

Island Green is now recycling three of the most common types of plastics using newly-purchased equipment at the ReSource Depot, their recycling center located behind VITEMA in Susannaberg on St. John.

On Friday, February 18, the public is invited to the ReSource Depot to see the new machinery in action from noon till 2 p.m. Members of the public who plan to attend are asked to email Kelly@islandgreenliving.org. An official unveiling of the equipment will be live-streamed at 9:45 a.m. on the V.I. Government's Facebook page.

The price tag for this initiative, known as the Ocean-Bound Plastic Recycling Program, isn't cheap. Harith Wickrema, board president of Island Green, said the cost for a year is close to \$360,000. Wickrema is personally putting up \$100,000 to match community contributions and make this long-sought goal a reality.



A bale of plastic is ready to be shipped to Michigan for recycling. (Photo submitted by Island Green Living Association)

As a strategy to boost the level of donations, Wickrema said he originally planned to match only donations of \$100 or more, but he was so touched by smaller contributions of \$20 or \$50 that he decided to match gifts of any size.

"It looks like many people have been looking forward to plastic recycling," he said. "I don't want people to feel their money doesn't count." Donations can be made on Island Green's home page <https://islandgreenliving.org>. Gifts of stocks can be made through partnering foundations.

Recycling is particularly important for island locations where plastic and other waste products can wind up in the ocean.

"Current estimates cite plastic waste entering the ocean at a rate of about 11 million metric tons a year globally, injuring and killing marine life and destroying habitats," according to [Island Green's website](#). "But once this plastic is part of the waste stream, our program aims to mitigate and reclaim this material from an unproductive, damaging end of life, where it would otherwise pollute our territory's waterways and choke our landfills."

Island Green is partnering with PADNOS, a fourth-generation recycling company based in Holland, Michigan, which contributed to the cost of shipping the equipment to St. John. PADNOS will process the plastic from St. John once it is baled and shipped.

St. John residents and visitors are asked to bring three types of plastics to the center for recycling:

#1 – marked PET or PETE (Polyethylene terephthalate) – which is typically used for water and soda bottles.



PET or PETE (Polyethylene terephthalate) is typically used for water and soft drink bottles. (Photo submitted by Island Green Living Association)

A collection of various household cleaning products is displayed on a dark grey surface. The products include several large white plastic jugs of Simple Green All-Purpose Cleaner, Softsoap Antibacterial Hand Soap, and Mr. Clean Magic Eraser. There are also smaller bottles of Nioxin shampoo, a bottle of Simple Green All-Purpose Cleaner, and a bottle of Simple Green All-Purpose Cleaner. A small white cap lies on the surface. In the foreground, a white recycling bin is visible with a green recycling symbol and the text "RECYCLE" and "islandgreenliving.org". The bin also features a logo for "LOVE CITY" with a heart shape and a tree. The background shows a chain-link fence and some foliage.

#5 – marked PP (Polypropylene) – used for yogurt and other food products.

For now, styrofoam, plastic bags, and plastic sheeting cannot be recycled using the equipment on St. John.



PP (Polypropylene) is usually used for yogurt and other food products. (Photo submitted by Island Green Living Association)

The public is asked to bring their plastics to the ReSource Depot, where the containers will be sorted and processed for recycling. Drop-off locations throughout the island will soon be announced.

The containers should be emptied and rinsed but needn't be squeaky-clean, according to Island Green's website. Caps, which are also recyclable, should be removed, but labels can be left on.

Recycling plastics has long been a goal of Island Green Living Association, according to Wickrema. The non-profit organization has been recycling aluminum cans since 2014, sending more than 1.2 million cans off-island to be processed.

Since re-opening at their current location next to VITEMA in 2021, the [ReSource Depot](#) has kept 650,000 lbs. of clothing, household items, and construction materials out of the landfill.

Also, in 2021, the ReSource Depot initiated a brush chipping program to produce wood chips for mulch. According to the website, "Mulch is now for sale at the site \$3 for a five-gallon bucket (please bring your own container); \$10 for a grain bag – equivalent to three five-gallon buckets – (\$1 is a deposit to return the bag and next time the bag is \$9 to be refilled); and \$50 for a bucket scoop from the Bobcat – this is the equivalent to 38 five-gallon buckets.

Wickrema said Island Green Living Association is now also turning its attention to food security issues and is working with the V.I. Government, the University of the Virgin Islands, and other agencies to develop a plan to expand food production throughout the territory.

For further information, contact The ReSource Depot at 340-473-7870.