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Opportunities in 'Junk' Bright

YOUNG people looking for career opportunities might take a look at openings for recycling specialists, or trash persons.

Richard W. Roberts, director of National Bureau of Standards, says: "In the not too distant future the junkman will probably be a highly skilled technologist, helping reclaim and reuse our valuable resources."

This should lend new dignity to garage sales, popular for years as a means of recycling unwanted items, some of it junk, from one household to others. Previously, church bazaars and rummage sales accomplished pretty much the same thing. Goodwill Industries and the Salvation Army also have done a pretty good job of recycling discarded materials, and they may have developed technicians or specialists under other titles.

A sign of the times was selection a few days ago of an OSU specialist in feedlot waste management to receive the annual "Young Extension Man" award. You don't have to be very old to recall when manure disposal personnel rated somewhat lower.

Trash hauling just a generation or two back was looked down upon by those who could afford to avoid the unsightliness, smelliness and dirtiness associated with such necessary activities. Now, in addition to dignifying the position, science is deodorizing the materials, mechanizing and automating handling, and computerizing the sorting out of reusable items.

Environmentalists started campaigning years ago to discourage indiscriminate tossing around of empty cans and bottles, but they didn't make much progress until aluminum companies began paying for return of the cans. Last year, collectors turned in 34,000 tons of cans for recycling, accounting for 14 per cent of aluminum used in new cans. The year is up this year.

Cities have a double problem in waste disposal. One is sewage sludge and the other is an infinite variety of stuff called garbage. They don't have to make a profit on recycling to make it pay. Many would be satisfied if they could just eliminate the expense of hauling it off and disposing of it.

Progress is being made in this direction. For example, Union Electric Company, St. Louis, Mo., has been burning ordinary trash and

garbage to produce electric power, reclaiming iron and other materials in the process.

Connecticut is building a statewide center to do essentially the same thing. A Massachusetts town has found that sewage sludge makes shellfish grow faster, but they're not finding much demand for clams and oysters grown under such conditions.

Congress has been recycling proposals for several years to offer tax incentives to business firms using reclaimed materials but nothing has come of them. Like many other suggestions, they seem to be consuming more energy than they produce.

The way it looks now, yesterday's mining engineer may be succeeded by tomorrow's recycling technologist. Opportunities may be greater, because we have a lot more junk than mineral ore.