

# Recycling Depends on Profitability

ON ALMOST any pretty day you may see people walking along roadsides or city streets carrying plastic bags into which they place aluminum cans or other "treasures" they may find.

The reason for this activity is that there is a market for recycled aluminum and collectors find it worthwhile. Sometimes whole families turn out to pick the borrow ditches clean.

A profitable market for reclaimed materials is the secret of success for recycling. Without it recycling won't cycle.

A reader telephoned to express concern about future sources of metals, fuels and other resources. He believes that we are overlooking a great opportunity by failing to convert waste materials and garbage into energy.

He is partially correct. This is being done in a number of places, but not nearly as many as had been predicted by waste-to-energy enthusiasts a decade ago. Many of the early plants have failed and been shut down, but others are being

built along somewhat different and simplified designs.

Oklahoma City has been trying for more than five years to get a waste conversion plant in operation and has contracted to pay a commercial firm \$6 a ton to take the trash off its hands. Latest reports are that the recycling may get started this year.

The biggest and costliest difficulty in reclaiming or converting waste materials is the tremendous tonnage of low-yield trash that must be handled. Americans throw away hundreds of millions of tons of garbage and wastes every year.

Municipal officials are having a hard time finding places to dump this stuff. Federal regulations call for elimination of open dumps by 1985, a big deal if it can be accomplished.

Anybody who ever tried to save newspapers for some organization to collect and sell can appreciate how waste piles up. When you get a lot of it the market dries up and you're stuck with it.

All sorts of wastes — paper, alu-

minum, steel, etc. — are mixed together in municipal garbage, making reclamation difficult. Methods of sorting have ranged from hand-picking on conveyor belts to giant magnets and burning of combustible materials.

A plant in the Oklahoma panhandle has been converting cattle manure into methane gas for sale to Chicago customers. Such installations succeed only near large feedlot locations.

Formerly European families combined their houses and barns, partially to take advantage of heat generated by their livestock. This is so abundant that a science magazine asserted that gas produced by animal life from cows to termites was hastening the appearance of global warming due to "greenhouse effect."

Thus it was not surprising when a Missouri researcher concluded a few years ago that putting 1,500 chickens in the basement of your home would provide enough heat so that you wouldn't have to turn on the furnace all winter.