



By Cecilia Vega

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Green 

Richmond factory collects \$1M for recycling

Wednesday, December 10, 2008 | 6:56 PM

RICHMOND, CA (KGO) -- Transforming trash into treasure comes with a financial incentive. The state handed out tens of millions of dollars in grant money on Wednesday to companies that use recycled materials in their products. One Richmond company is now more than a million dollars richer for its efforts.

At one Richmond factory, one man's trash is another man's high-end kitchen countertop. Even in these tough economic times, Vetrazzo's owner, James Sheppard, says customers can't get enough of his counters made from recycled glass.

"We've been very fortunate, essentially our demand is way up, we're up 400 percent over last year," said James Sheppard, the Vetrazzo owner.

And business could soon get even better. The company is one of 20 around California to receive \$20 million in grants from the state. The money comes from unclaimed California refund value, or CRV's, which are that five cent redemption the state gives for recycled cans and bottles.

State Department of Conservation Director Bridgett Luther says the recipients, like this Richmond factory, all use recycled materials in their products.

"It's not just enough to collect recycled materials, but we also need to turn them into something useful," said Luther.

At Vetrazzo, that something useful is a colorful slab that ends up as a countertop, bathroom vanity or fireplace all created from the most commonly recycled objects.

Glass wine and beer and bottles that are put out on the curb for recycling, could end up in Richmond inside one of the popular countertops that are shipped around the country. Some countertops are made from 100 percent from one kind of glass, like recycled Skyy Vodka bottles.

"Which of course means were taking more raw materials, which of course means that while a lot of other companies are taking less recycled stock going into their production process, were using more," said Sheppard.

The country's recycling industry has seen a major decline in recent months, with recycled materials piling up in plants because there are so few buyers due to the economic downturn. But glass has not been hit as hard and state and officials hope these grants will make a difference.

"When the economy goes down, it hits everybody. It even hits the recycled materials industry. We're hoping through these types of grants, we can start to stimulate the economy toward that material and keep it here in California," said Luther.

State recycling officials told ABC7 the grants given out to these companies will have an added benefit. They could create as much as 2,000 new, badly needed jobs in California.

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