

# Member Profile: United Plastics, Inc. Part 1

*"We don't treat your scrap like garbage"*

by Allan Harari, Environmental Committee Chair

**E**nvironmental Stewardship — the words continue to buzz throughout IAPD's events, communications and publications. You've probably also heard "green supply chain," "sustainable design," "ecological footprint," "environmental management systems" and more — sounds like a bushel of paperwork with little return on investment (ROI).

"It's not as complicated as it sounds," said Sahil Aggarwal, manager of IAPD member United Plastics, Inc. "At UPI, we make it as easy as possible for companies to recycle plastic waste. We do it on a national scale; and we pay for it!" Last year, UPI processed more than 30 million pounds of plastics waste — a bunch of it purchased from IAPD member companies.

United Plastics, Inc. ([www.upirecycling.com](http://www.upirecycling.com)) located in Gurnee, IL, USA was started by Sahil's father, Anil Aggarwal in 1988, who, remembering the squalid conditions that governed the dumps and recyclers in his native India, saw an opportunity to create jobs and contribute to the environment in his new country while helping recyclers and other business associates in his old country.

"We are also hosting [www.signindustryrecycling.com](http://www.signindustryrecycling.com) geared toward sign industry customers," Sahil explained. "The sign industry, which represents only about 15 percent of UPI's total supply chain, generates a whole lot of recyclable material. More sign companies and their distributors are taking recycling seriously. The volumes are growing rapidly."

UPI isn't the only IAPD member who sees growth. "We see lots of value, on multiple levels, in recycling," said Keith Fricker who heads up Laird's Recycling Division. Since starting their program in 2009 processing 180,000 pounds of scrap, Laird's recycling program has grown to almost 14 million pounds last year.

IAPD headquarters has also seen increasing interest from small, medium and large member companies. Applications for the IAPD's Environmental Award have doubled in the last two years as more companies are discovering the benefits that members with a long recycling history have enjoyed over time.

"UPI deals exclusively in post-industrial material, that is, anything made for industry: windshields for vehicles, point-of-purchase displays, outdoor signs and any scrap generated from the manufacturing process of those items," explained Sahil. Almost 90 percent of collected scrap is waste generated from a manufacturing process. For example, a sign company that cuts channel letters out of a 4' x 8' sheet of acrylic is left with cutouts that have, in the past, ended up in landfills and dumps. That's changing, as more companies become members of the "scrap supply chain."

The industry has even provided employment opportunities for the homeless community. The United States, like other parts of the world, quietly supports a community of garbage pickers who know their sources. "We buy from one guy who found a company that dumps Lexan in their dumpster. This guy collects it for us on a regular basis!" said Sahil.

Random collectors are "infamous" in the "infamous" world of post-consumer waste (bottles, bags, milk jugs, other single-use items); an industry that claims recycling volumes of more than 100 million pounds annually. This sounds like a lot, but recyclers pay much less per pound for that scrap. Where's the value for IAPD members?

"UPI tries to maximize price for our customers and keeps the process simple by providing training and a time-tested system," said Sahil. UPI delivers bins to their customers who fill them up with any type of polymer waste that cannot be reused for any of their internal processes. UPI then picks up and weighs the bins since payment is based on a price for pound augmented by the quality of the scrap.

There is a scrap market and prices move daily. The more volume and the more segregation (which improves scrap quality) a company provides, the higher price paid per pound. While segregation has a big impact on price, the largest expense in the process is trucking costs. UPI, which picks up and delivers bins nationally, tracks freight costs relative to scrap and finds that the price/pound of scrap doesn't fluctuate as much as freight costs. Accumulating volume helps keep freight costs down and total price per pound paid up — that's where IAPD distributor members can play a big role.

If you don't have a recycling program in place, one great way to learn about it is to submit an application for the IAPD Environmental Award. You will be surprised by how many of your customers are also looking to get into the loop — and that gets us back to where we started: Environmental Stewardship.

Many IAPD members are aware that performance plastics are very different than — and should not be lumped in with — single-use or "post-consumer" products that grab the headlines and the eyes of legislators and their constituents. The IAPD Environmental and Government Relations Committees have been working to bring the public and the Congress up-to-speed on the differences in materials. Regardless of the current efforts to relax regulations, we cannot take a breather. Public perception remains the greater threat to the true value of our industry and that perception still manages to lump performance plastics in with single-use and every other type of plastic — the differences are stark.

Previous Environmental Corner articles have addressed the benefits of performance plastics compared with glass, metals and wood. Little has been said about the value and methods of recycling. In part two of this article in the next issue, we'll drill deeper into what is driving the growth of the recycling industry and the specific ways your company can find value in your company's environmental stewardship.

In the meantime, take a look at Sahil's websites and a quick look at the Environmental Award application available at [www.iapd.org](http://www.iapd.org). Plastics recycling companies interested in becoming IAPD members can find information about membership under the Join menu at [www.iapd.org](http://www.iapd.org).