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Posted on Fri, Jan. 27, 2006

### Paper comes full circle in mail 'tree'

By Kiley Russell  
CONTRA COSTA TIMES

In a dark corner of a warehouse on San Francisco's industrial Pier 96 an oddly foreboding 17-foot tree has taken root.

Conceived by installation artist Dio Mendoza, the tree stands as a testament to one of modern life's most persistent irritations - junk mail.

Scraggly and imposing, the once-was pine is built entirely of unsolicited "direct mail" advertising Mendoza collected over the course of about three weeks from just one of his San Jose neighbors.

"Let's face it, we're a gluttonous society," he said at a news conference Thursday. "We consume a lot."

The tree rises at Norcal Waste Systems' cacophonous Recycling Central, where 600 tons of bottles, cans and paper products leave for new lives every day.

The tree drew a small contingent of reporters and photographers to the kickoff of a Bay Area anti-junk-mail campaign.

"We'll always want to recycle, but we have to do it better. We can save more environmental resources if we reduce waste," said Todd Sutton of stopwaste.org, a public agency in Alameda County dedicated to "promoting sustainable consumption and disposal patterns."

The campaign's organizers say they hope that by eliminating at least some of the nation's annual onslaught of 42 billion pieces of junk mail - chewing up roughly 100 million trees - they will help the environment and ease a daily mailbox frustration for millions.

The "Stop Junk Mail" campaign is being waged by the Bay Area Recycling Outreach Coalition, which includes all nine Bay Area counties and 100 cities in the region.

The group will make its pitch on radio and in print for the "Stop Junk Mail Kit." The kit includes "take-my-address-off-your-mailing-list" postcards addressed to the nation's top two direct mail organizations, Direct Marketing Association in New York and Harte Hanks Direct Marketing in Maryland.

It takes about six months before the volume of unwanted catalogs, credit card applications and brochures drops off dramatically, said Catherine Pandori, the anti-junk-mail coordinator.

The kit includes an example of a letter people can send directly to companies who may not use the large direct marketing firms. People should resend such letters and postcards every

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three years, Pandori said.

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The Bay Area campaigners can only hope to stop a trickle of the junk mail flood. The market forces behind mass merchandising are powerful and insistent.

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"Direct mail is one of the most effective and cost-efficient tools for marketers," Direct Marketing Association's spokeswoman wrote in an e-mail response to questions.

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One of its surveys showed that "direct mail (noncatalog) provided an estimated \$483 billion in increased sales to the U.S. economy in 2005, with catalogs adding another \$133 billion," wrote Stephanie Hendricks.

The direct mailers are interested in easing the flow of unwanted mail, she said. Saving money and avoiding consumer hostility have led the industry to use some new technologies to target mailing lists to those more likely to want it, Hendricks said.

**PARTNER SITES****SiliconValley.com**

Still, the Stop Junk Mail troopers have high hopes.

They say they're trying to resurrect "the real message that was born in the '70s, lost in the '80s and '90s."

"It's better to reduce (waste)," said Jared Blumenfeld, director of San Francisco's Department of the Environment.

"Let's not cut down trees needlessly."

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**ONLINE****TO STOP JUNK MAIL**

Had it with junk mail or does it help you as a consumer? Talk about it online at [www.contracostatimes.com](http://www.contracostatimes.com).

**ONLINE****TO STOP JUNK MAIL**

- Visit [www.stopjunkmail.org](http://www.stopjunkmail.org) or call 877-STOPWASTE to request a Stop Junk Mail Kit.
- When buying from catalogs, on the phone or online, tell the company not to sell your name or send you promotional mail.
- Call the number on the catalog or send a letter requesting removal of your name from the mailing list.
- Write "Do not sell my name" on the bottom of checks.
- Ask service providers such as banks, insurance companies, Internet companies, etc. not to send you promotional materials.

**WHAT DOESN'T WORK**

- Writing "Return to sender" or "Refused" on junk mail. The Postal Service will throw it away.
- Returning junk mail with postage due.

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