

THE BACK BAY SUN

S H E D D I N G N E W L I G H T O N A N O L D N E I G H B O R H O O D

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Abundance of phone books arrive on Back Bay steps

by Penny Cherubino



credit: Penny Cherubino

caption: The management at 416 Marlborough Street has put unclaimed phonebooks out for recycling.

Last week piles of telephone directories appeared on the front steps of Back Bay buildings. The deliveries, from two different publishers, offered residents copies of Verizon White Pages, Verizon Yellow Pages and the competing Yellow Book.

The three books contain 4,868 pages, weigh 10 pounds, and stack 6 inches high. New phone books produce a lot of paper for the city's public works department to process. "We do urge people to recycle. Your older phone books can be recycled with paper in your regular recycling pickup," said Jennifer Mehigan, a spokeswoman for Mayor Thomas M. Menino.

Recycling old phone books is not the only issue. With phone numbers available on the internet, some residents don't use phone books. Brand-new directories, still in their plastic wrappers, made their way from front steps to blue recycling

bins this week.

While local statistics were not available, nationally, 640,000 tons of phone books enter the waste stream each year. Of these, "Only 18 percent are recycled." said Scott Cassel, executive director of the Product Stewardship Institute — a national, nonprofit organization headquartered on Newbury Street, and dedicated to reducing the health and environmental impacts of consumer products.

"The manufacturers of the phone books are distributing these, even when people don't want them. Like many products they end up on local governments' doorsteps... and it's up to the local government to either recycle or dispose of these phone books," Cassel said.

Towns like Chelmsford have passed ordinances that allow residents to opt out of directory deliveries. In other locales, CD-rom versions are available as an alternative to printed copies.

Fresh phone books are welcome in other homes. "I use the Internet for out-of-town numbers, but I still use the phone book for anything that's local. Maybe it's generational, but I feel I have to have one in the house," said Commonwealth Avenue resident Pauline Bilsky.

While she took a full set of books, Bilsky did have a concern with the number of directories left in her foyer. "We have only six units in this building, and there must have been a dozen sets of phone books delivered. It's a huge waste." She felt that publishers should be responsible for returning to collect the excess and for disposing of them in a responsible manner.

Generational preferences aside, these are not your grandmother's phone books. The redesign of this year's Yellow Pages was the result of research into what

consumers want from the publication, according to Andy Shane, spokesman for Idearc Media Corp., publisher of the Verizon print directories.

Over the years, publishers have added incentives, like coupons, to make the directories more attractive to both advertisers and consumers. The first coupon in the new Yellow Pages is for Marlborough Street's Stanhope Framers. "We've had great success with coupons with Verizon," said owner David Murphy. He has been buying yellow page advertising since he founded the company 35 years ago and carefully tracks how people come to his business. "Number one is word-of-mouth. Number two is Verizon Yellow Pages."

Besides coupons, the new publications contain a community magazine, area maps, a health and wellness guide and restaurant menus.