

GLOBAL GROWTH WITH ENVIRONMENTAL FOCUS



Malmsten has a history of being environmentally conscious. From the inception of Malmsten, Inc, the US subsidiary recycling was part of the ethos. For example, the boxes used have multiple lives. They start at the disc molder to store inventory; when those discs are turned into lane lines, those boxes get loaded with finished lane lines and shipped out. We deliver the lane lines locally and reclaim those boxes for another round. This is an excellent example of an environmentally friendly, economically sound action. Boxes are expensive. Using them more than once makes economic sense.

In 2022 while delivering a whole truckload of lane lines to the Mona Plummer Aquatic Center, the apparent conclusion we came to was that an equal volume of old lanes was coming out of the pool and probably going to a landfill. What could we do to offset that problem? Fortunately, we had two excellent interns from the Thunderbird School of International Management that summer. Much of the leg work on this project needs to be credited to Jake Desiderio from the Thunderbird school. We began identifying how a lane line's components could be reused, repurposed, or recycled.

RECYCLING

The metal portion of a Malmsten Lane line is easy to recycle. The wire and spring are all 316 L Stainless Steel and carry real value in a scrap yard. Unfortunately, not all wires are created equal. For example, a wire with a plastic coating isn't worth very much because A. There is less wire and more plastic. B. The plastic is difficult to remove before melting down. The Take-up reel is mostly Stainless steel but has a plastic portion. This is one per lane line, so not too cumbersome to remove before recycling.

The Spring and Take-up reel are also reusable. The quality of the material is high, so they can be reused after the discs have faded and chipped from daily wear and tear, UV rays, and Chlorine. There are significant savings on a new lane line if the Spring and Take-up reel are reused. The bulk of the product is plastic which is much harder to recycle. We found companies that would buy and grind plastic to be recycled into other products. The caveat is that they want very large quantities. Much larger than any single pool could supply. We discovered that we could have our product ground up and reused back into the raw material with no quality degradation. The recycling companies would consider a smaller quantity if we were both the supplier and the purchaser, as there was no risk for them. Of course, the drawback to that portion of the plan is that we are years away from having any of our used lane lines. We would only use our source of plastic as we would not have control over the quality.

REPURPOSING

We found numerous sources to reuse plastic discs and donuts.

- School stem teachers love them for different projects.
- Art departments are in constant need of materials for sculptures etc.
- Making awards for Swim meets
- Summer camps to do projects.

The list is limited only by imagination and opportunity.

We presented this topic at the 2023 AOAP conference in Colorado Springs. One of the presentation's more creative ideas was to use the old lanes as flower bed borders. This would be attractive and save money for your local community garden at the same time.

BIO-BASED and BIODEGRADABLE PLASTIC

As a result of research, there are plastics on the market that are Bio-based and Biodegradable. These biodegrade in landfills at a much shorter period than Petroleum-based plastic. This is an exciting idea worth considering. Research and product testing must happen before jumping into a new product like this. There could be no loss of quality or strength in the plastic. These plastics cost more than our current ones. The question needs to be asked, "Will the market support a more expensive but environmentally friendly lane line?"

GLOBAL IDEAS, LOCAL SOLUTIONS

Several things became apparent as we worked through the reuse, repurpose, and recycling issues. First, only some solutions are going to be viable in some locations. For example, we will eventually reuse the old plastic discs from pools into new lane lines in Arizona. It would not make sense to ship old lane lines back from out of state for that purpose. However, a plastic recycler might be willing to take smaller quantities in your community. Those discs might end up as base material for playground structures.

Some ideas are universally applicable. School teachers exist everywhere, and kids love round things! If you gave me 4 round floats as a child, I'd make a car and look for somewhere to race it. As an adult, the idea of a disc derby where the kids on your swim team make their cars, bring them to the pool, and race them down the slide seems appealing and a fun night for the team.

Recycling should be easy and financially viable. Most people can agree that the less we waste or put into the landfill, the better off we will be. It is less likely to happen if doing that is expensive. If recycling your old lane lines means shipping them to Arizona, then the value is zero at that point. Recycling can be good for the bottom line. Donating used discs to a University art department that is also a 501 C 3 might have some tax advantages. Please consult your accountant on that one!

There are many great answers to reducing the number of old lane lines going into landfills. Our goal in sharing this is to start a conversation around recycling. The more shared ideas, the more likely you are to find one that connects with your community and might inspire you to think, "I could do that," and then do it.

Simon Percy, Vice President
Malmsten Inc.



Listen to the SwimSwam podcast about recycling.



Mikael Orn and Simon Percy at Malmsten USA.