

FINAL REPORT

CURBSIDE RECYCLING

PROGRAM REVIEW

WEST HAZELTON BOROUGH

May 2003

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1.0 Background

The Borough of West Hazleton (Borough) is located in the southeast corner of Luzerne County. The Borough has a population of 3,542 persons (2000 census) and provides curbside collection of recyclables, leaf and yard waste and municipal solid waste (MSW), to approximately 1,634 households. The Borough has operated its mandatory recycling program since 1991, over the past several years the Borough has experienced a steady decline in participation in its residential recycling program.

2.0 Introduction

Over the past several years, the Borough has experienced a decline in the amount of recyclables collected from its curbside collection program. This trend has become more pronounced over the past few years, for example; the amount of recyclable materials collected in 2000 was 317 tons, during 2001 only 214 tons were collected.

The Borough wishes to identify the probable reasons for the notable reduction in recyclable materials collected and options for reversing the ongoing trend.

3.0 Program Analysis

Based on meetings with Borough representatives and review of information and data collected, a number of factors can be identified that may be contributing to the decline of participation in the Borough's recycling program.

These factors include:

- The Borough's population has been steadily declining from the period of 1990 to 2000. The Borough's population has decreased from 4,280 to 3,542 (according to the respective census).
- Special populations.
 - High percentage of senior citizens greater than 30% of population.
 - Influx of spanish speaking residents.
 - Transient population, i.e.: college students.
- Residential dwelling units are being replaced with commercial enterprise.
- The Borough's education/information program has not been updated or sustained.
- Enforcement and/or incentive programs have not been pursued.

The decline in population (738 persons) assuredly impacted the amount of recyclable material available to the Borough. The drop in population is not, however, considered significant in that it occurred over a 10-year period. That is the population did not decline significantly between the years of 2000 and 2001 yet the amount of recyclable material collected did show a drastic decline.

It appears that the primary reason for reduced participation in the residential recycling program is that the residents aren't getting the message "RECYCLE".

The message was presented loud and clear when the program started. Education and information regarding the recycling programs benefits and its requirements were

presented to the Borough's residents. Containers for household collection of recyclables and brochures on how to prepare materials were distributed to residences and the program was well promoted in the media.

Over the past ten years, the Borough has continued to provide dependable curbside collection services. It has distributed collection calendars indicating the designated collection days for recyclables and instructions for preparation of designated materials. The Borough has also regularly placed public notices in the area newspaper "The Standard Speaker". The Borough has met the requirement of Act 101 for public education/information but the message "RECYCLE" is not as effective as it could be nor is it reaching all of the residents.

New residents may not be totally aware that they are required to recycle, or how to for that matter, particularly if English is not their primary language. Long term residents need to be reminded of the program's importance and requirements. The large senior citizen population may not all be getting the recycling message. Off campus college students residing in the Borough are transient in nature. Students attending the nearby Penn State Campus are an ever-changing sector of the population.

Comprehensive education is the key element in addressing all sectors of the population, revitalizing the recycling program and increasing participation. Education cannot be short-term it must be reinforced on a regular basis to be effective.

The Borough has to reach its general population and its special populations i.e.: senior citizens, spanish speaking, students and new residents. Lack of compliance/participation can generally be attributed to the resident's lack of understanding of how the program works and what is required. Education is a fundamental part of enforcement, i.e.: increased education/outreach = increased participation. The message "RECYCLE" must be repeated on a regular basis so it won't be forgotten or ignored.

4.0 Education/Outreach

It is recommended that the Borough update its existing education/outreach tools and approaches and expand its education campaign. The Borough has developed a calendar that addresses the how and what aspects of recycling very well but lacks educational material that creates a positive "get involved". Portraying individual participation as the key to a successful recycling program is imperative. Educational materials (brochures, news releases, public service announcements, block advertisements, etc.) should briefly and concisely address the following:

1. Why recycle?

By recycling, you:

- reduce dependence on waste disposal facilities;
- reduce the waste stream;
- close the loop on recycling, post consumer materials are reprocessed into new items;
- save valuable natural resources (which happen to belong to future generations);
- save energy by remanufacturing goods;
- help keep disposal costs down;
- reduce air and water pollution;
- avoid cost of disposal;
- increase Borough revenue through 904 performance awards.

2. Who will be recycling?

- All conscientious residents, good citizens of all ages, decent individuals etc.

3. When will recyclables be collected?

- The Borough's collection calendar is direct and easily understood; it doesn't, however, provide motivation or generate interest or enthusiasm.

4.1 Update

In addition to providing information on collection dates and fundamental materials preparation, the calendar and or brochure should promote the public's understanding of the program in a manner that will interest and encourage participation.

The following is a list of items suggested to be included in an updated calendar:

The goals of the program;

- 'Why you, "the individual" are important to the success of the program;
- The environmental and practical reasons for recycling;
- Required preparation of materials (concise and easy to follow);
- Questions usually asked and answers;
- The name and telephone number of "who to contact" if questions or problems arise;
- It's the Law (and the Borough will enforce it).

The calendar could be printed on a refrigerator magnet and accompanied by a brochure.

Refrigerator magnets act as constant reminders of the program. Promotional items such as refrigerator magnets are fundable under Section 902 Grant.

4.2 Outreach

Go to the people and make it personal. It is recommended that the Borough distribute new collection containers. The Borough has not distributed new containers to its residents. New resident may not have received a container and many long-term residents may be in need of a new container. Hand distribution to each residence is strongly suggested. Promote the distribution of the new containers; this will generate interest and enthusiasm as well as questions. Containers assist in demonstrating commitment on the part of Borough and make the effort of recycling more convenient for residents, the more convenient the program, the higher the participation rate.

The containers can be delivered by the Borough collection crew; Borough officials can also assist with the process, thereby demonstrating their commitment. Include civic leaders, environmental organizations, etc. getting the community involved will raise the environmental conscious.

Make it an event, contact media well in advance of the planned delivery date (four (4) to six (6) weeks). Also, contact a variety of media to address all sectors of the population.

4.3 Suggested Program Components

Implementation of a comprehensive education/outreach campaign will help insure the program is successful initially and over the long run. The following are suggested components for developing an education and information program that will gain public

interest and increase enthusiasm and support. The components are applicable to residential and commercial recycling and/or leaf and yard waste composting programs.

- Place an ad in a paper of general circulation providing details of the program and its merits, suggest this be done twice per year and for any special events.
- Prepare and distribute news releases and public service announcements to the local media. Provide program details, program kick off date and importance of the program e.g.: waste stream reduction, saving on disposal fees, saving/reuse of valuable resource, reduction of dependence on disposal facilities and, of course, it's the law.
- Development of a slogan e.g.: send your leaves to a mulch better place; recycle today for a better tomorrow. Slogans help with program identity and purpose.
- Develop a logo representing the program that will be readily identifiable. The logo can act as a constant reminder (particularly if its placed on a refrigerator magnet or calendar).
- Prepare an instructional flier, door hanger or brochure, one that is eye catching and to the point: (i.e.: who, what, where, when and why). The flier, door hanger or brochure could be distributed by volunteers or sent with Newsletter, utility or tax bills to save on mailings. Additional brochures (and posters) could be placed in public buildings and local businesses.

- A banner or banners can help publicize the program. A banner could also be used for recycling re-enforcement (e.g.: a reminder used for earth day and other events). These banners could be used repeatedly for special events.
- Distribute promotional items that encourage participation, (e.g.: a refrigerator magnet collection calendar, pencils, pens, rulers made from recycled materials). Items that are seen or used regularly and will act as a constant reminder. Distributing this material periodically will reinforce the program. Don't overlook the commercial institutional sector distribute posters or decals to participating entities.
- Preparation of a recycling display outlining the programs benefits, charting participation and avoided cost of disposal, etc. The display could be placed in the Municipal Building and used at various civic events.
- Incentive programs for participation, that is: regarding households or businesses that participate. Conduct a random drawing and if the selected household or business is participating, a prize is awarded or a certificate or recognition.
- Encourage and assist schools to provide for recycling/composting education programs. Youth "will" be constant reminders to adults regarding recycling and composting often our best educators of adults.

4.4 Special Populations

As discussed, above special population such as senior citizens, spanish speaking, college students and new residents must also be informed/educated. The general elements listed above can be applied to the noted special populations. However, some additional efforts must be made to effectively reach the various special population sectors.

Although the message is the same for all residents “RECYCLE”, where and how it’s delivered often makes a difference. Mailings don’t always reach new residents or they reach the residents and are not understood. One local newspaper, radio or TV station won’t reach all sectors of the population. For example, not many students listen to classical or ballroom music on a public radio station, nor do many senior citizens listen to rap or hard rock stations. The vast majority of senior citizens and students probably don’t listen to spanish speaking stations. Those that do may enjoy the music but probably don’t understand the language.

One other sector of the population must also be addressed, the commercial sector. The ongoing transition of properties from residential to commercial use should be closely monitored. New commercial enterprise should be provided information on the recycling program and their responsibilities. The commercial sector is required to participate and the same basic guidelines for education and outreach apply to this sector of the Borough’s population. Its corporate citizens must also be informed and motivated. It is suggested that the Borough update its listing of its commercial entities and include them in the

recommended education/outreach program. Suggestions and examples of education and promotion materials to address the commercial sector are included in Attachment A.

4.5 Customized Education

The education program for these special populations to include the commercial sector must be customized somewhat.

The same message only different delivery vehicles. All radio and TV stations are required to provide a certain number of Public Service Announcements (PSA). Local or regional talk radio, soft music, rock and spanish-speaking stations are usually happy to assist and provide PSA's and news announcements for an important environmental program and its good business for them to do so.

Using general circulation newspapers target each separate sector with block advertisements. Preparing news release or making announcements at public meetings are also effective. Gear the ads and/or releases and announcements to each individual sector; emphasize the importance of their individual participation. This could be done during senior citizens week, a local celebration (e.g.: Cinco De Mayo), the beginning of the school year (or at each semester) and don't forget the commercial sector. A special event with an environmental theme could be planned that would include all sectors. Form a committee composed of representatives from both the general public and special populations.

Contact clubs and organizations that each target sector is affiliated with, senior citizens centers, chiropractors (just kidding but humor can be useful), social clubs, business associations, churches, student organizations and the college administration. Obviously the information for spanish speaking residents should be in spanish (Note (1)). Consider using a larger print for seniors. The information/education material should be eye catching and to the point as noted above. Color cost a little extra but it's worth it.

Note (1): Earth 911 provides PSA's, videos, and press releases in spanish for a variety of environmental topics, they can be ordered online at: <http://www.earth911.org/master.asp?s=psa&a=psa/orderform.asp>.

New citizens should receive an information packet, these can be provided by the Borough collection crews (personal contact). The crewmembers are probably the most aware of changes in households. Attachment B contains a number of examples of education/ outreach promotional items. It is suggested that educational material note that assistance to citizens who may have physical limitation can be provided, include a contact number for assistance or question.

5.0 Enforcement

Often taking enforcement action and publishing violations in the paper will be enough to get reluctant individuals to participate. It is the Law, this is important for all to understand. As previously stated public education is an essential element of enforcement. It has been repeatedly demonstrated that once residents clearly understand the program and what is required of them compliance issues diminish and participation increases.

The E word “Enforcement”, enforcement notices should be provided to collection crewmembers or the crew chief, the notice should be multi-purpose. A simple X marking the message to be conveyed.

- Materials were not properly prepared.
- Materials were contaminated.
- Participation is required this notice is a warning. (Explain on the notice the penalties for non-compliance and when appropriate follow through).
- Provide instructions for corrective action required.

6.0 Collection Assessment

The Borough has provided consistent and reliable curbside collection services, this is commendable considering the equipment available. The Borough’s two (2) aging packer (1983 – 1994) trucks for commingled material and a small dump truck (1986) for paper are currently used for curbside collection of recyclables and MSW.

The Borough has realized that collection using the packer trucks and a dump truck is not efficient and that they are in need of a truck specifically designed for collection of recyclables. The Borough has researched and selected a recycling collection vehicle that would best serve its needs. The vehicle the Borough has specified would serve the recycling program and could also serve the leaf and yard waste collection program. The specifications call for a 37 cubic yard recycling truck equipped with hydraulic over the top loading – right and left side loading, partitions within the trailer body and, right and

left driver cab access. Several efficiency and safety features are also specified. The selected truck would certainly meet the Borough's needs.

Unfortunately the Borough has been experiencing financial difficulties and is operating on an extremely limited budget and does not have the financial resources to purchase the much needed vehicle. The Borough had applied for an Act 101 Section 902 Grant in 2001; unfortunately it did not receive funding.

Based on observations of the current equipment and collection practices, it is recommended that the Borough reapply for grant assistance to purchase a collection vehicle for its recycling program.

Considering the stressed financial conditions, the Borough is experiencing, grant funding for the specified vehicle or similar collection vehicle may be essential to insure the successful continuation of the curbside recycling program.

Based on experience, it can be assumed that, at a minimum, the recycling vehicle will reduce manpower, maintenance and fuel requirements and increase collection efficiency. The new vehicle would replace the packer trucks and dump truck now used for recyclables collection thus extending their useful life. The Borough could realize much needed cost savings for its collection programs. Additionally, a compartmentalized vehicle would allow for curbside sorting (separation of commingled materials into

separate bins), which could also result in positive cost benefits for the Borough, e.g.: by sorting recyclables higher market value can be anticipated.

7.0 Waste Reduction/Reuse

In that the Borough also provides for collection of residential waste, it will be in the Borough's best interest to actively promote recycling, waste reduction and reuse programs. The more waste that is diverted from its waste stream the greater the avoided cost of disposal. Each ton diverted from the landfill represents a savings in cost/ton tip fees and related transportation and labor cost. Information regarding waste reduction and reuse programs is abundantly available on the web from a variety of sources including but not limited to: PADEP, <http://www.dep.state.pa.us>, Professional Recyclers of Pennsylvania, (PROP) <http://www.proprecycles.org> and EPA, <http://www.epa.gov>.

If the Borough wishes to initiate an active waste reduction program, it is recommended that the Borough consider the establishment of a Pay-As-You-Throw (PAYT) program. As discussed with the Borough, a PAYT or unit pricing program could greatly reduce its waste stream and increase the amount of recyclables, leaf and yard waste collected. Paying for waste on a per unit/per bag basis provides households incentives to recycle and reduce waste. This program is fair and equitable; you only pay for what you dispose of. Over two hundred communities across the state have successfully initiated a PAYT program. As suggested during our recent meeting, EPA has developed guides and work sheets that will assist the Borough in assessing the benefits of a PAYT program. This

information is provided online at the EPA web address noted above. PADEP and PROP also provide valuable information and case studies on their respective websites. An EPA introduction/overview of the PAYT program is provided in Attachment C.

8.0 Recommendations

It is recommended that the Borough:

- Implement a comprehensive education program that addresses the general population and the noted special populations. Waste reduction and reuse should also be actively promoted as part of its outreach efforts.
- Apply for an Act 101 Section 902 Grant to gain the funding required to purchase a recycling collection vehicle and new residential collection containers. The application should also include a request of \$10,000.00 to fund a comprehensive Education/Outreach Program. The \$2,000.00 previously budgeted by the Borough is not considered sufficient for development and implementation.
- Seriously consider the establishment of a PAYT program. Benefits of a PAYT program include: a reduced waste stream, increased participation in recycling, increase in Section 904 incentive payments and reduce collection and disposal cost.

ATTACHMENT A

EDUCATION AND PROMOTION

MATERIALS FOR COMMERCIAL

SECTOR

Materials available upon request.

ATTACHMENT B

EDUCATION/OUTREACH PROGRAMS

Available upon request.

ATTACHMENT C

EPA INTRODUCTION/OVERVIEW

PAYT PROGRAM

Available upon request.