

US EPA ARCHIVE DOCUMENT

Fort Collins, Colorado

Population: **100,000**

Start planning for implementation at least

Type of Community: **Urban**

six months in advance. This means both

Type of Program: **Varies**

working with your private haulers and

Program Start Date: **January 1996**

educating the public.

Getting Started: Why Pay-As-You-Throw?

Fort Collins is located on the Front Range of the Rocky Mountains in Colorado. Last year its population passed the 100,000 mark, but the community still takes pride in a small-town self-image, and residents are determined to manage growth well. The natural environment is highly valued, and solid waste reduction is a strong environmental program in Fort Collins.

The city conducted outreach and sponsored a recycling drop-off site for nearly 10 years, but without a municipal trash collection service, increased participation depended on haulers' efforts. A 1991 ordinance required haulers to provide curbside recycling, but because they included this service as an additional cost, most customers were unwilling to pay for the service. Construction of a county recycling center in 1992 also had little effect on residents' recycling levels.

The city council adopted goals in 1994 to reduce the total waste stream by 20 percent by the year 2000, despite the city's growth, and to reduce landfilled waste by 20 percent.

A specific target was set for increasing participation in curbside recycling by 80 to 90 percent. Reaching these goals has been challenging, because six private trash haulers work in Fort Collins, ranging from corporate players like BFI and Waste Management to locally run family operations that have been in business for 40 years.

Disappointed in a slow rate of progress for recycling, the city council adopted two ordinances in May 1995 that apply to single-family and duplex residences. The first ordinance called for haulers to "bundle" costs for recycling and provide curbside recycling to customers upon request at no extra charge. It became effective in October 1995. The second ordinance called for volume-based rates to be charged for solid waste starting in January 1996.

Pay-as-you-throw has helped us to reach our recycling goals—a real challenge, since there are six private trash haulers that work in Fort Collins.



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Pay-As-You-Throw Rates Are Working in Fort Collins, Colorado

Background

Fort Collins is located on the Front Range of the Rocky Mountains in Colorado. Last year its population passed the 100,000 mark, but the community still takes pride in a small-town self-image, and residents are determined to manage growth well. The natural environment is highly valued, and solid waste reduction is a strong environmental program in Fort Collins. The city conducted outreach and sponsored a recycling drop-off site for nearly 10 years, but without a municipal trash collection service, increased participation depended on haulers' efforts. A 1991 ordinance required haulers to provide curbside recycling, but because they included this service as an additional cost, most customers were unwilling to pay for the service. Construction of a county recycling center in 1992 also had little effect on residents' recycling levels. The city council adopted goals in 1994 to reduce the total waste stream by 20 percent by the year 2000, despite the city's growth, and to reduce landfilled waste by 20 percent. A specific target was set for increasing participation in curbside recycling by 80 to 90 percent. Reaching these goals has been challenging, because six private trash haulers work in Fort Collins, ranging from corporate players like BFI and Waste Management to locally run family operations that have been in business for 40 years. Disappointed in a slow rate of progress for recycling, the city council adopted two ordinances in May 1995 that apply to single-family and duplex residences. The first ordinance called for haulers to "bundle" costs for recycling and provide curbside recycling to customers upon request at no extra charge. It became effective in October 1995. The second ordinance called for volume-based rates to be charged for solid waste starting in January 1996.

Lessons Learned

Start planning for implementation of the rate structure change at least six months in advance. We didn't start working with the haulers until September to implement the system in January. Then, after meeting together several times, the city agreed to amend the ordinance to respond to haulers' concerns about charging strictly by volume, but this process was time-consuming and difficult.

Make sure to publicize the changes to remind the public and their elected officials about what will occur in the next 2 to 3 months. Use news articles, advertisements, and haulers' billings.

Don't underestimate the difficulty people will have understanding how new trash collection rates work, and plan for the extra work it creates for staff. Be prepared for it to take 3, 6, or even 9 months for people to realize that they can save money by generating less trash with a PAYT system.

Expect private trash haulers to take the opportunity to increase collection rates at the same time the volume-based rates take effect. The public assumed the hike in collection rates was a result of the ordinance. Haulers helped spread the misunderstanding—it deflected criticism from them!

Make sure the transition between billing systems is smooth. Because we had some program overlap, both our haulers and the city staff got a new round of calls from angry, confused people who had received two different bills. However, the city has been adamant about reimbursing customers for cans/bags of trash that they didn't

generate—the most important feature of the system to reward people with cost savings.

Success: Increased Recycling Participation

As of July 1996, recycling has increased to 79 percent participation in single-family and duplex households, up from 53.5 percent the previous year. With only 6 months' worth of data to analyze trends, it is hard to specify what is happening with solid waste reduction goals, but we have clearly found a way to accomplish our goal for 80 to 90 percent participation in curbside recycling.

Now that the residents of Fort Collins are so much more conscious of reducing their waste stream, they have demanded opportunities to recycle new materials, including cardboard, office paper, and compostable items.

The bundling ordinance and PAYT system have significantly increased households' recycling efforts, so the experience, although sometimes difficult, was certainly worthwhile. Now that we're 6 months into the new system, the city council is already looking ahead to the feasibility of districting Fort Collins into trash collection zones!

We know that Fort Collins is not completely out of the woods yet. We are anticipating, for instance, that this fall's leaf-raking and bagging will add to peoples' trash bills—and that they are going to demand that the city do something about it. Still, we feel confident that Fort Collins made the right choice by adopting the pay-as-you-throw ordinance.