

US EPA ARCHIVE DOCUMENT

PAY-AS-YOU-THROW SUCCESS STORIES

Poquoson, Virginia

Population: 11,500

Type of Community: Suburban

Type of Program: Bags

Program Start Date: July 1992

With pay-as-you-throw, we've had the largest amount of recyclables collected in our nine-community regional recycling program for four years.

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

In the fall of 1991, we decided to shut down a very successful drop-off recycling center and join a regional curbside program the next spring. Our main reason for going with the curbside program was that we knew we could get better citizen participation and further increase recycling. Because of the success of the drop-off program, we were asked by the city council to review the city trash program and develop a plan to improve it.

Our group was made up of about a dozen interested citizens, two city employees, and two city councilmen. One of the first things we did was to develop the following mission statement: "To review every aspect of waste management in Poquoson to maximize REDUCTION, REUSE, and RECYCLING, and to recommend ways to accomplish this with the minimum cost to the taxpayer."

This statement was read at the start of every meeting to make sure we stayed focused on our agreed-upon goal. After discussing all

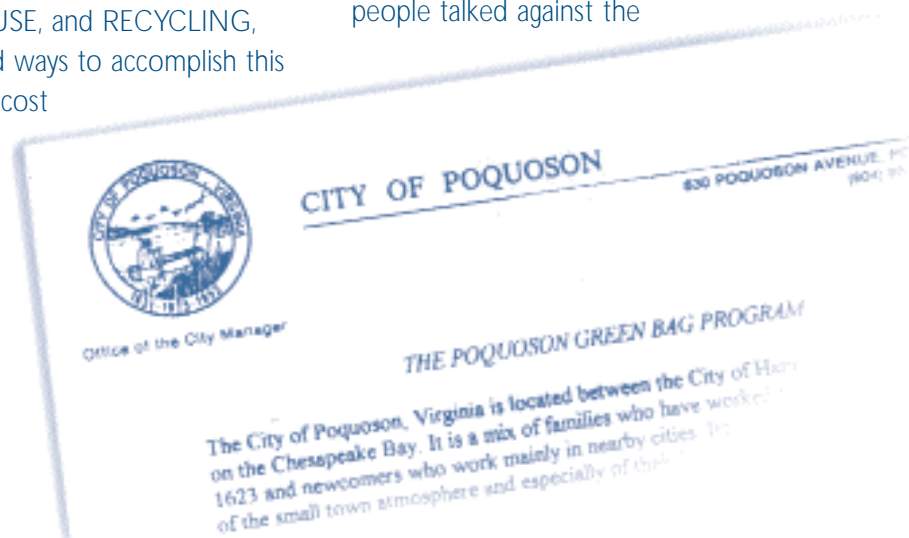
types of different programs, we decided to focus on a fairly new system that was volume-based and where people paid for the amount of trash they discarded, rather than a flat-fee system.


Bringing the Opposition on Board

We called and talked to people involved with these different programs and found out what problems and successes they were having. We eventually ended up with two three-inch binders full of information.

After many meetings and sometimes heated discussions, we were ready to submit our basic recommendations to the city council and the public. At the public hearing, seven people talked against the

Two years after the program started, a city councilman who had voted against the new program came up to me in a local store with a smile on his face and simply said 'You know, you were right.' Then I knew the program was really working.





plan, and the city council seemed split on the issue. The word “change” is usually not well accepted in Poquoson. We invited the seven speakers against our plan to join our committee and work with us to develop a final recommendation. In the end, the six that joined us supported the final plan.

Bags, Tags, or Cans?

Another big question was: Do we use bags, stickers, or containers? Our research showed that stickers are being counterfeited in one city and that there is no effective way to control bag size. Containers required a large, upfront capital cost, and we wanted to develop a program that required no additional cost to the city. Furthermore, we are a very windy city—and typically after a trash pickup empty trash cans roll all over the neighborhoods! Since all of our trash was being sent to a waste-to-energy (WTE) plant and not a landfill, plastic bags were not a negative as far as disposal was concerned. We decided to use plastic bags.

How Best To Distribute the Bags?

Although many cities sell their bags from city office locations, this puts a big burden on city personnel and can be inconvenient for citizens. We talked with all

our grocery, drug, and convenience stores and set up a program in which they would sell the bags and turn over all the proceeds to the city after they were sold. In other words, they would make no profit on selling the bags, but also would have no investment in them. It was pointed out to them that this would be a community service.

Spreading the Word

The next step was informing the public of the new program, how it would work, and when it would start. We prepared news releases for our local papers, wrote articles for the city newsletter, and made a videotape of the program using local talent that was then shown on the city public access channel. We also trained speakers about the subject and made them available to any groups that were interested.

“We’re number one every time”

We are part of a regional recycling program with nine other cities and counties. Because of the way our trash program encourages recycling, our city has had the largest amount of recyclables collected per house, per month for the entire four years we have been in the program. We’re not number one most of the time, we’re number one every time.