City of Charlotte Solid Waste Services

Executive Summary

For more than 20 years, the City of Charlotte Solid Waste Services (SWS) collected recyclables using a manual, dual-stream recycling model in which materials were collected once a week and sorted at the curb by type of material. In July 2010, SWS rolled out a transformed recycling experience for Charlotte residents with the implementation of single-stream recycling.

The improved Recycle It! program included:

- A wheeled 96-gallon cart for increased capacity to collect recyclables and for easier transport to the curb; equipped with a lid to prevent litter in neighborhood streets
- Bi-weekly recycling collection service
- The addition of aerosol cans, milk and juice cartons, juice boxes and plastics 3, 4, 5 and 7 to the approved list of items accepted in the program.

SWS implemented an integrated public education campaign to inform residents what to expect before, during and after the transition to single-stream recycling.

The first year of single-stream recycling (from July 2010 through June of 2011) produced an annual increase of 30% in residential recycling tonnage. This exceeded the goal of 20% established for the first year of the program.

In addition to the increase in the amount of recyclables collected, SWS measured the overall single-family recycling participation set-out rate at 50%, meaning approximately 50% of all households were setting recyclables out on their collection day. The rate prior to single-stream recycling was 42%.

Garbage tonnage also decreased by approximately 7% during the first year of single-stream recycling. This diversion of more than 10,000 tons of materials from the landfill produced landfill disposal savings of approximately $274,000.
City of Charlotte Solid Waste Services

Statement of Intent

In July 2010, the City of Charlotte Solid Waste Services improved its Recycle It! program with the implementation of single-stream recycling.

Using a combination of communication strategies ranging from grassroots marketing, community engagement and media relations, SWS implemented an integrated public education campaign to inform residents what to expect before, during and after the transition to single-stream recycling.

The City of Charlotte Solid Waste Services is submitting this campaign for SWANA’s 2012 Marketing Excellence Award to share our continued success with the improved Recycle It! program.

Research/Planning

Background

For more than 20 years, the City of Charlotte Solid Waste Services (SWS) collected recyclables using a manual, dual-stream recycling model in which materials were collected once a week and sorted at the curb by type of material. In 2008, the Environmental Committee created by City Council asked City staff to investigate options for increasing participation in the residential recycling program.
The City of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County also made a joint commitment in the 10-year Solid Waste Management Plan to decrease the amount of residential garbage entering the landfill. After investigating available options that would help increase recycling, City staff recommended a transition from a manual, dual-stream recycling collection program to an automated, single-stream program. Research from other municipalities that implemented the single-stream collection process showed that bi-weekly (every other week) single-stream recycling would provide operational efficiencies, improved customer service, increased residential recycling program participation and reduced operating expenses.

In July 2010, SWS rolled out an improved recycling experience for Charlotte residents with the implementation of single-stream recycling. This transition addressed the need to provide residents with an easier way to recycle and the ability to recycle more materials.

The new Recycle It! program included:

- A wheeled 96-gallon cart for increased capacity to collect recyclables and for easier transport to the curb; equipped with a lid to prevent litter in neighborhood streets
- Bi-weekly recycling collection service
- The addition of aerosol cans, milk and juice cartons, juice boxes and plastics 3, 4, 5 and 7 to the approved list of items accepted in the program.
Recycling program improvements also presented an opportunity for reduced operating expenses. Single-stream recycling collection is projected to produce 10-year savings/cost avoidance of $43.35 million. The program generated first-year savings of $3.4 million which was on track with projections.

**Research**

Prior to the transition to single-stream recycling, information on Charlotte residents’ recycling habits were obtained by analyzing a recent recycling study commissioned by Mecklenburg County and completed by Clark and Chase.

The information below is taken directly from the Executive Summary provided by Clark and Chase. The data is based on responses from 800 Charlotte residents, 200 in other Mecklenburg County towns who were identified by themselves or someone in their home as the person most likely to make decisions regarding the collection of trash and recyclables for the household. More than 2,000 random surveys were conducted (61% women and 39% men):

- An estimated 80% of households in Mecklenburg County set out their recyclable material at least once every two weeks. Seventy-one percent of households set out recyclables on the most recent collection day.
- When asked as a more subjective measure of recycling, 60% of households say they participate in recycling “all the time” and two in ten (18%) participate “most of the time.”
- Most (88%) householders feel they have at least a good understanding of what can be recycled or not (32% have an “excellent” and 56% have a “good” understanding).
Even though they are not required, nearly half (48%) of all households that recycle at the curbside, also separate their recyclables in some way.

Additionally, there was a request from the Hispanic community to conduct a targeted outreach campaign in their community. Latino leaders believe many members of their community are unaware of the recycling program and that the time is right to begin educating the Hispanic/Latino community on recycling.

**Previous Recycle It! Collateral Materials**

Prior to the transition to single-stream recycling, SWS used a variety of marketing materials such as advertising, community events, direct mail and communication tools to educate residents on the previous Recycle It! program. See Attachments Section of this submission for examples of previous collateral materials.

**Target Audiences**

The primary target audience consisted of single-family residents (including multi-family residents living in complexes with fewer than 30 units). SWS currently provides collection services for approximately 207,000 single-family households.

**Goals**

The goals of the public education campaign included:

- To create a positive atmosphere for the transition from the current recycling program to the improved recycling program
- To effectively communicate the benefits of the improved recycling program
- To increase residential recycling by 20% in the first year of transition to single-stream

**Strategies**

The strategies that were developed for the campaign included:

- Position transition to single-stream recycling as an improvement to the current recycling program
- Communicate directly with customers (internal and external)
- Develop targeted campaigns for the minority communities to help raise awareness and educate on the importance of recycling

**Opportunities & Challenges**
The transition to single-stream provided an opportunity for the SWS to reorganize the collection process for all materials. More than 80 percent of Charlotte residents received a new collection day as a result of the operational changes in the other service areas designed to maximize efficiency and provide a more economical way of collecting garbage, yard waste and bulky items.

The service day changes coupled with the transition to single-stream recycling presented the following challenges that Solid Waste Services addressed:

- **Service Day Changes/Weekly to Bi-weekly Service**: Informing 80% of Charlotte residents of a service day change and helping all residents keep track of their bi-weekly recycling collection service. All residents received a detailed letter in the mail with information on their new collection day and recycling collection week (Green or Orange). The mailing also included a recycling collection calendar that is color-coded to reflect the recycling collection weeks – Green and Orange.

- **Rollout Cart Concerns**: Some residents expressed concern about the size of the recycling cart and storage of the cart. Residents were given the option to opt out of receiving a recycling cart and could continue to use the red recycling bin.

- **Employee Training**: Re-routing the entire City of Charlotte meant that all SWS employees would be working on new routes. Employees received extensive training to re-learn territories and the new established collection patterns.

- **New Technology**: Radio frequency identification (RFID) chips were embedded in the new recycling carts. Some concerns about privacy surfaced. SWS had to plan and develop strategies for using the unfamiliar technology even when data collection was imperfect (malfunctioning readers on collection vehicles). These chips have helped the City track and manage cart inventory (this includes tracking cart maintenance expenses); monitor driver performance and recycling participation rates; and better focus recycling and environmental education.

*Single-stream recycling collection*
**Measurement**

The primary tool that was used to measure campaign success was the RFID chips that were embedded in the new recycling carts. This new technology allows staff to monitor recycling participation rates. The technology continues to be useful in helping staff better focus recycling and environmental education based on the recycling trends of Charlotte communities.

**Implementation/Execution**

Using a combination of communication strategies ranging from grassroots marketing, community engagement and media relations, SWS implemented an integrated public education campaign to inform residents what to expect before, during and after the transition to single-stream recycling. See Attachments Section of this submission for examples.

**Direct Mail**

- Letter/Calendar – Program information and recycling collection schedule (calendar) were mailed to residents a few months prior to the program launch.
- Water Bill Inserts – Information detailing the upcoming Recycle It! program improvements were included in a few bill inserts prior to the launch.
- Reminder Postcards – Mailed to residents a month before the launch to remind them of the upcoming recycling changes and their new recycling collection information.

**Advertising**

- Print – Newspaper advertisements (also in Hispanic publications) detailed when residents could expect their new recycling cart, direct mail with recycling collection day information and the official launch date of the improved program.
- Radio – PSAs aired during the campaign to announce the launch date and promote the website where residents could find more information.
- Online – Banner and leader board ads were placed in conjunction with our print/radio ads and linked to the Recycle It! website.

**Media Relations**

- Press releases were distributed announcing the start of recycling cart deliveries and the launch of the improved Recycle It! program.
- TV interview segments with various local stations aired to educate residents on the improvements to the Recycle It! program.
**Public Education**

- Press Event – Held to officially announce the launch date of the improved Recycle It! program and the benefits of the transition to single-stream recycling.
- Web – The Recycle It! website ([http://recycleit.charlottenc.gov](http://recycleit.charlottenc.gov)) was launched prior to the transition to single-stream to provide up-to-date information and FAQs. Residents were able to subscribe to notifications of site updates.
- Community Events – Throughout the campaign, staff attended various community events to allow attendees to walk the “green carpet” and learn more about the improved Recycle It! program.
- Neighborhood Meetings – Attended neighborhood meetings to educate residents on the improved Recycle It! program.
- CMail (Electronic Newsletter) – Various articles announcing the improved program were included in the City’s electronic newsletter.
- GeoNotify Message – Using the police department’s reverse 911 calling system, a pre-recorded message from our SWS Director was sent to all residents prior to the program launch. The message provided information on when recycling cart deliveries would begin and the website where additional program information could be found.
- Web Promotion Cards – Promoted the new Recycle It! website where residents could find up-to-date information on the improved Recycle It! program. Cards were distributed at community events prior to the program launch.
- Pocket Cards – Provided information on improvements to the Recycle It! program. Cards were distributed at community events prior to the program launch.
- Door Hangers – Distributed to residents identified as having recycling preparation issues once the improved Recycle It! program began.

**Communications Timeline (2010)**

Communication methods were implemented according to the following timeline:

**January/February**

- Recycle It! press event
- Launched Recycle It! website

**March**

- Geo-Notify recorded message sent
- Cart attachments with recycling cart deliveries
- Began print, radio and online ads

**May**
• Direct mail – letter/calendar, water bill insert

June

• Direct mail – reminder postcard

July

• TV/radio media interviews
• Direct mail – water bill insert

Throughout the Campaign

• Social media (Facebook, Twitter)
• CMail – electronic newsletter articles
• Community events “Green Carpet”
• Recycle It! website updates
• Neighborhood meetings
Budget

Due to the major program change that impacted all single-family residents, a significant part of the overall single-stream program budget went toward the extensive public education campaign.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communications</th>
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<td>Door Hangers</td>
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<td>Cart Delivery Attachments (day cards, bags)</td>
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Community Partnerships

Single-stream recycling program implementation also required collaboration with City, County and private sector partners to ensure a seamless transition. These partnerships included:

- Mecklenburg County – Supported Mecklenburg County’s modification of the Materials Recovery Facility (MRF) to accept additional recyclable materials. Also partnered with the County to communicate the transition to single-stream recycling to Charlotte residents.
- CharMeck 311 – Ensured CharMeck 311 employees were trained on the new processes for managing the service days/weeks and rollout carts.
- Inland Service Corporation – Worked closely with Inland, the private sector service partner, to facilitate a seamless transition to the new recycling program since Inland would now provide service to all citizens.
- Otto Container Management Corporation – Worked with the rollout cart supplier and cart maintenance contractor to develop a successful plan for new recycling cart delivery to more than 200,000 Charlotte households.
- Local organizations, neighborhood leaders and media outlets – Engaged various communication resources to help promote the improved Recycle It! program.

Results & Evaluation

The new Recycle It! program has been well received by Charlotte residents. Despite the change in service days for a majority of the population, the rate of complaints remained well below the state IOG (Institute of Government) average. By June of 2011, recycling service complaints averaged less than 10 per 10,000 units serviced on a monthly basis.

The first year of single-stream recycling (from July 2010 through June of 2011) produced an annual increase of 30% in residential recycling tonnage. This exceeded the goal of 20% established for the first year of the program.

In addition to the increase in the amount of recyclables collected, SWS measured the overall single-family recycling participation set-out rate at 50%, meaning approximately 50% of all households were setting recyclables out on their collection day. The participation rate in 2009 was 42%.

Garbage tonnage also decreased by approximately 7% during the first year of single-stream recycling. This diversion of more than 10,000 tons of materials from the landfill produced landfill disposal savings of approximately $274,000.

Overall the Recycle It! campaign results were very favorable and the campaign goals were met. Some of the improvements we are looking into include:
• Targeted communications based on recycling behaviors
• Partnership with local businesses to offer incentives for recycling participation
• On-going creative strategies that will help achieve the ultimate goal of increasing residential recycling within the City of Charlotte

Yes, this program is replicable in other communities. In fact, SWS has been asked, by other municipalities who are transitioning to single-stream recycling, to share the communications model used to educate Charlotte residents.
Attachment 1
Previous Recycle It! Logo & Brochure
Attachment 2
New Recycle It! Logos
The following items **WILL** be accepted in the Recycle It! Program:

- Aerosol Cans
- Aluminum
- Cardboard
- Glass
- Paper
- Plastics #s 1-5 & 7
- Spiral Paper Cans
- Steel Cans

The following items **WILL NOT** be accepted in the Recycle It! Program:

- Clothing
- Household Garbage
- Pizza Boxes
- Plastic Shopping Bags
- Plastics #6
- Styrofoam

For more information, visit http://recycleit.charlottenc.gov.
Your New Recycling Cart Has Arrived!

Your new recycling cart has arrived! Your chance to Go Green for Charlotte will begin in July when you put your cart to the curb for recycling collection. Until then...

- Please store your cart and do not use it until the improved Recycle It! program kicks off in July. Continue using the red recycling bin for collection until you receive information in the mail regarding your new recycling collection day.
- If you prefer not to use the City-issued 96-gallon recycling cart when the improved Recycle It! program begins in July, you can continue to use the current red recycling bin.
- Please call 311 to alert our staff and we will pick up your recycling cart. You can also go online to http://recycleit.charlottenc.gov. Click the link titled CART PICKUP-RECY and follow the prompts.
- Please note that beginning in July, recycling crews will only collect up to two red bins or one 96-gallon recycling cart per household every-other-week on your scheduled collection day. Both types of containers will not be collected from one household. Additionally, the City will no longer issue replacement red bins.
- Check your mail in May for a letter that will provide additional details on the improved Recycle It! program and your new collection schedule.
- Go to http://recycleit.charlottenc.gov and click Notify Me to sign up for alerts and to learn more about the new materials accepted in the program and other improvements.

We are excited about the improved Recycle It! program and look forward to working with you to help keep Charlotte green.
Attachment 5
FY11 Recycle It! Collection Calendar

The City of Charlotte Solid Waste Services will provide recycling collection every-other-week. My recycling collection weeks are shown in.

El Servicio de Desechos Sólidos de la Ciudad de Charlotte proporcionará servicio de recogida de reciclables cada dos semanas. Su semana de recogida es el.

**12-MONTH RECYCLING COLLECTION SCHEDULE**

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Solid Waste Services will provide regular collection services on all holidays except:
- Thanksgiving Day - November 25
- Christmas Day (Observed) - December 27
- Martin Luther King, Jr. Day - January 17

For these holidays collection services will operate on a one-day delay with Friday customers receiving service on Saturday. For more information on the Recycle It! program, visit [http://recycleit.charlottenc.gov](http://recycleit.charlottenc.gov).

Para estos días festivos, el servicio de recogida será con un día de retraso y para los clientes que tienen la recogida el viernes, será el sábado. Para más información visite [http://recycleit.charlottenc.gov](http://recycleit.charlottenc.gov).

*Subject to change. Check our website or call 311 for up-to-date information.*

*Sujeto a cambios entre en nuestro portal o llame al 311 para recibir información más reciente.*
Attachment 6  
FY12 Recycle It! Calendar

### 12-Month Recycling Collection Schedule

My recycling collection calendar week is GREEN or ORANGE (circle one). If you currently receive recyclable service, your collection week has not changed. If you are unsure of your recycle collection week, visit recyclit.charlottenc.gov or call 311.

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Days without color indicate observed holidays. Collection services will operate on a one-day delay with Friday customers receiving service on Saturday.
Attachment 7
Recycle It! Web Advertisement Samples

Your New Recycling Experience Begins In July.
Are You Ready? Find out more at:
http://recycleit.charlottenc.gov

It's in the mail!
Information on your new recycling collection schedule is coming this month.
Go to http://recycleit.charlottenc.gov for more details.
Charlotte’s residential recycling program offers an improved way to recycle – a larger cart, more recyclables and a new collection schedule.

While going green for Charlotte, please remember:

Your recycling collection schedule.
Recyclables are collected every other week on your scheduled collection day. You can find your collection day and recycling collection week online at http://recycleit.charlottenc.gov or by calling 311 (704.336.7600).

What items are accepted for recycling collection.
- Aerosol cans \textit{NEW}
- Aluminium
- Cardboard
- Glass
- Juice boxes \textit{NEW}
- Paper
- Plastics 1-7 \textit{NEW}
- Spiral paper cores
- Steel/tin cans
- Wax-coated milk and juice cartons \textit{NEW}

How to prepare recyclables for collection.
Before placing recyclables in the recycling cart, rinse out food residue, remove lids from containers and cut cardboard into 3x3 feet pieces.

Where to place your recycling cart for collection.
Your recycling cart should be placed at the curb, not on the sidewalk. The cart should be no more than 2 feet from the curb and at least 3 feet from the garbage cart, yard waste and other obstacles such as mailboxes, telephone poles, automobiles, bulky items, etc.

To learn more about the improved Recycle It! program, visit http://recycleit.charlottenc.gov.
For nearly 20 years, the City of Charlotte has offered recycling collection as a weekly, curbside collection program. Beginning in July, Recycle It!, Charlotte’s Residential Recycling program, will be improved. The following FAQ offers information on the improvements and benefits to residents.

How is the recycling program changing?
The current program will feature several enhancements, including:

- A new name. The improved program will now be called Recycle It! Charlotte’s Residential Recycling Program.
- New materials. Starting in July, residents will now be able to recycle aerosol cans and all plastics except No. 8. An updated list of materials accepted in the program is below:
  - Aerosol cans
  - Aluminum
  - Cardboard
  - Glass
  - Paper
  - Plastics 1-5 & 7
  - Spiral paper cans
  - Steel cans
- A larger, wheeled cart. Residents will use a 96-gallon wheeled cart to collect their recyclables. This cart will replace the current 16-gallon bin. The new cart offers ease of use and navigation for carrying the cart to the curb and more room. Additionally, the cart has a lid, which helps prevent recyclables from littering the street.
- New collection schedule. Recyclables will be collected every other week beginning in July. Residents will receive information in the mail with the week and date of their first recyclables collections on the new schedule. Residents can also find out their collection week by going to the Address Information Center.
- Decreased emissions. Changing the collection schedule to every other week allowed for a reduction in collection vehicles, which decreases emissions and helps local air quality.

What will be the dimensions of the new recycling cart in comparison to the current bin?
The new recycling cart will be 96-gallons. It will be similar in shape and size to the current garbage cart. The cart will be between these dimensions: 42” x 24” x 32” and 48” x 32” x 35”. The current recycling bin is 19” x 15” x 10 ½”.

When will the new 96-gallon rollout carts be delivered?
Delivery of the new recycling carts to City residents began March 1. Delivery will continue through June. As more information regarding cart delivery becomes available it will be posted at http://recycle. charlottenc.gov; advertised on local radio and television stations; placed in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Utilities Water Bill insert; and shared at community events.

Why could residents not be provided with additional existing bins with every-other-week collection? Is that not just as effective, and a better cost measure, short and long term?
Studies have shown that the most effective way to increase recycling is to increase container capacity. The City will be providing containers with 96-gallon capacity. Our current red bins are 18 gallons. Additionally, much of the savings associated with our every-other-week program results from the efficiencies of semi-automated collection. It is very laborious and time consuming for an employee to manually service each household. The every-other-week process means that considerably higher volumes of recyclables will be at the curb at each household on collection day, making the manual loading process even more laborious and time consuming in comparison.
Attachment 10
Recycle It! Press Release Sample

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

City to Begin Distribution of New Recycling Carts Next Week
Residents are asked to store carts until Recycle It! program launches in July

Monday, February 22, 2010 – (Charlotte, NC) – Charlotte residents will receive a large, green package next week. The City of Charlotte will begin distributing the new 96-gallon, green recycling carts to Charlotte residents on Monday.

‘While we will begin cart distribution on March 1, the program still does not go live until July,’ said Key Business Executive Victoria O. Garland. ‘We want to make sure they understand that they will continue using their red bins until July,’ said Garland who stated that residents will receive information in the mail regarding their new collection day. Additionally, Garland offered the following for residents:

• If you prefer not to use the City-issued 96-gallon recycling cart when the improved Recycle It! program begins in July, you can continue to use the current red recycling bin.

• Residents Call CharMeck 311 as soon as possible to alert City staff you will continue using the red bin.

• You can also go online (http://recycleit.charlottenc.gov) 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to request not to receive a cart.

• If you receive a cart and don’t want to keep it, you can also call or go online. Someone will come and pick up the cart.

• You can also go to http://recycleit.charlottenc.gov and click Notify Me to sign up for alerts, learn more about the new materials accepted in the program and other improvements.

For more information on the Recycle It! program go to http://recycleit.charlottenc.gov

Interview/Photo Opportunity: On Monday, March 1, media representatives will have an opportunity to capture video footage and get pictures of crews prepping for cart distribution and to follow them as they begin delivery of more than 200,000 carts. Distribution is expected to last until mid-June and crews will deliver an estimated 1,500 carts per day. Please contact Brandi Williams at 704-336-6864, if you are interested in this opportunity.

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Attachment 11
Recycle It! Press Release Sample

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Coming to Charlotte Residents July 5 … Improved Recycle It! Program and Service Day Changes

June 28, 2010 — (Charlotte, NC) — Residents will finally get their chance to Go Green for Charlotte when the improved Recycle It! program begins July 5. In addition to the improved Recycle It! program, residents will experience a change in their service day for garbage, recyclables and yard waste collection. Service day changes result from collection route adjustments that were made in an effort to maximize efficiency and customer service.

Residents were recently mailed a letter and calendar from Solid Waste Services that indicated their new collection day as well as information on how to participate in the improved Recycle It! program. Postcards were also recently mailed as a reminder to residents regarding the upcoming service improvements.

Residents who have misplaced their letter or calendar and are unsure of their new collection day, can find out their day at http://curbit.charlottenc.gov or call 311 (704-336-7900).

With the improved Recycle It! program, residents will be able to recycle more items. In addition to the materials currently accepted in the recycling program, the City will accept empty aerosol cans, juice boxes, milk and juice cartons, and all plastics except number 6, in the recycling carts.

A green, 96-gallon rollout cart was delivered to residents for the collection of their recyclables. Recyclables will be collected every other week, on the same day as garbage and yard waste collection. Residents are reminded that the green cart is for recyclables only and must not be used until the improved program begins the week of July 5. Residents who haven’t received a new recycling rollout cart by July 5, should call 311.

Residents are also reminded:
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Improved Recycle It! Program Exceeds First-Year Goal

August 15, 2011 – (Charlotte, NC) – The numbers prove it – Charlotte residents are taking advantage of the improved Recycle It! program. Since the transition to single-stream recycling a year ago, the residential recycling tonnage has increased by 30% in comparison to the same period last year. This exceeded the goal of 20% established for the first year of single-stream recycling.

“We are excited to see such a tremendous increase in the amount of recyclables collected”, said Victoria O. Johnson, Solid Waste Services Key Business Executive. “This increase, we believe, can be attributed to the improvements that were made to the recycling program.”

Last July, Charlotte residents began using the improved residential recycling program. Several improvements made to the program included a 96-gallon rollout cart and the addition of aerosol cans, milk and juice cartons, juice boxes and plastics 3, 4, 5 and 7 to the approved list of items accepted in the program.

In addition to the increase in recyclables collected, Solid Waste Services has noted the overall single-family recycling participation rate is now 50%, meaning approximately 50% of all households are setting recyclables out on their collection day. Last year’s participation rate was 42%. Also noted during the first year of single-stream recycling was that garbage tonnage decreased by approximately 7%. This diversion of more than 10,000 tons of materials from the landfill produced landfill disposal savings of approximately $274,000.

As the improved Recycle It! Program enters its second year, Johnson says there are things residents can do that will contribute to the continued success of the recycling program. Residents are reminded to:

-more-

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