

MEMORANDUM

To: The Honorable Zach M. Klein, President, City Council
The Honorable Priscilla R. Tyson, President Pro Tem, City Council
The Honorable Elizabeth C. Brown, City Councilmember
The Honorable Shannon G. Hardin, City Councilmember
The Honorable Jaiza N. Page, City Councilmember
The Honorable Michael Stinziano, City Councilmember
The Honorable Mitchell J. Brown, City Councilmember

cc: The Honorable Hugh J. Dorrian, City Auditor
Greg Davies, Chief of Staff, Mayor's Office
Joe Lombardi, Director, Department of Finance and Management

From: Jennifer Gallagher, Interim Director, Department of Public Service

Subject: Annual Progress Report for RecyColumbus, Columbus' Comprehensive Residential Recycling Program.

Date: March 8, 2016

Overview

This serves as an annual report to Columbus City Council regarding the status and progress of RecyColumbus, the City's residential recycling program for calendar year 2015. This annual report was promised to City Council during the planning phase of the recycling program in November 2011.

With the support of City Council, the program entered the first of its five implementation phases in April 2012 and concluded in February 2013 with 187,926 single family households. Recycling and yard waste were collected on alternating weeks. In March 2014, the program was expanded to service low-density condos, townhouses and apartments and the schedule was altered to increase efficiencies for Rumpke as well as reduce confusion among our residents. Now, under the recycling program, recycling and yard waste are collected on the same day, every other week, for 200,766 households.

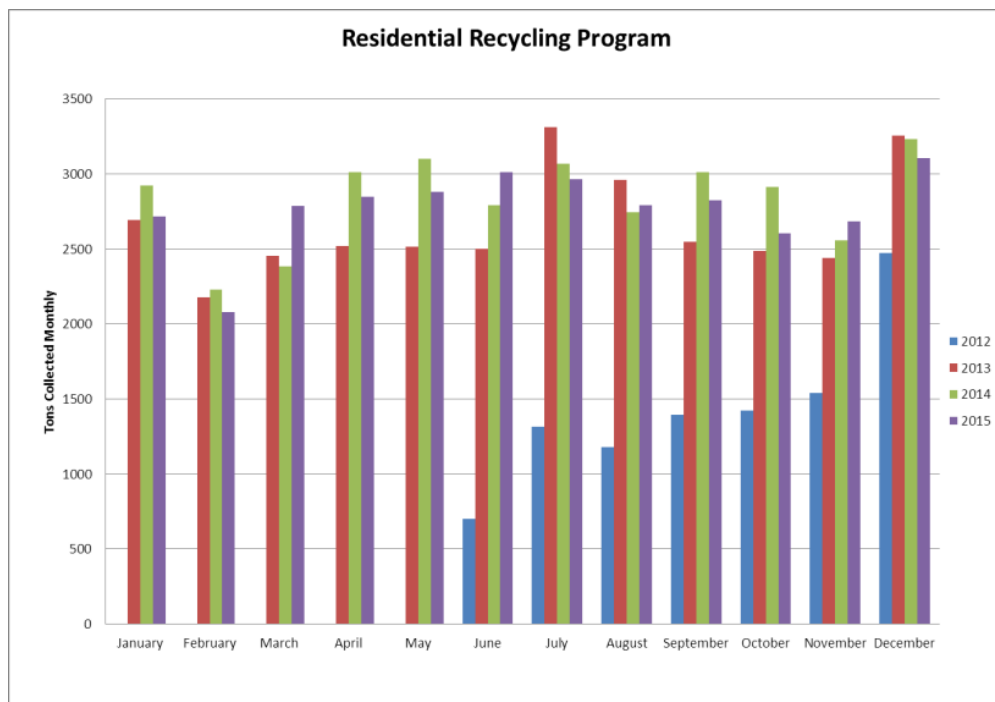


Recycling Participation Rate

Rumpke counted program participation four times throughout the year. Drivers counted blue recycling carts as they serviced them and divided that number by the total amount of carts in the field. The average participation rate for 2015 was 78 percent (up from 71 percent in 2014).

Diversion Rates in Percentages and Tonnage

In 2015, the RecyColumbus program served 200,766 households, which diverted 33,293 tons of recyclable material from the landfill (an average of 332 pounds per house annually). Residents also used the Solid Waste Authority of Central Ohio drop boxes, which yielded 9,087.39 tons of material. In total, Columbus residents diverted 42,380.29 tons in 2015, which is equal to an 18.2 percent diversion rate for 2015, a decrease from 18.9 percent in 2014.



As of December 31, 2015, a total of 205,749 households were eligible to receive a 64-gallon recycling container, of which 200,766 accepted a container. The residential recycling deployment rate stands at 97.5 percent. The original 2015 recycling goal per household was 485 pounds per year, for a 22 percent diversion rate. In 2015, 332 pounds of recycling material were collected per household, for a 14.9 percent diversion rate.

	Calendar Year 2012	Calendar Year 2013	Calendar Year 2014	Calendar Year 2015	Total
Households Serviced	149,469	187,926	201,326	200,766	
Tons of recyclable material diverted from the landfill	26,261	40,682	43,507	42,380	152,830
Tipping Fees Saved	\$1,456,425	\$2,253,079	\$2,402,460	\$2,339,800	\$8,451,764

Overall Program Expenditures for the RecyColumbus Program

Description	Calendar Year 2012	Calendar Year 2013	Calendar Year 2014	Calendar Year 2015	Total
Personnel Cost	\$227,442	\$267,326	\$261,595	\$329,776	\$1,086,139
Materials & Supplies Cost	\$2,450	\$1,767	\$1,569	\$2,110	\$7,896
Services Cost (Rumpke, other)	\$1,805,202	\$2,869,204	\$2,832,885	\$2,832,885	\$1,094,035
Fleet Vehicle Costs	\$22,856	\$31,697	\$8,500	\$11,316	\$74,369
Total Operational Funds Expenditures	\$2,057,950	\$3,169,994	\$3,104,549	\$3,176,087	\$11,508,580
Purchase & Delivery of Containers	\$7,833,971	\$598,917	\$58,164	\$35,059	\$8,526,111
Consulting services for curbside recycling education	\$336,266	\$73,750	\$93,999	\$82,988	\$587,003
Total Capital Funds Expenditures	\$8,170,237	\$672,667	\$152,163	\$118,047	\$9,113,114
Total Operating & Capital Expenditure	<u>\$10,228,187</u>	<u>\$3,842,661</u>	<u>\$3,256,712</u>	<u>\$3,294,134</u>	<u>\$20,621,694</u>

Efforts to Improve Diversion Rates and/or Reduce Program Costs

City staff has regular conversations with Rumpke to find ways to increase the types of materials that are recyclable in the residential program. In addition, the City will continue to encourage residents to fit more material in the carts by compacting the recyclables. The City will also continue efforts to encourage signing up for collection reminders and will target outreach to specific neighborhoods to increase participation.

Public Education, Outreach and Engagement

Through a contract with Murphy Epson, the City continued to spread awareness of the program through neighborhood-level grassroots efforts and our digital channels of communication, and we engaged residents to solicit their ideas on how to improve the program and increase understanding and participation.

Research, Education and Engagement Efforts

- Solicited participation for and conducted nine focus groups with 43 total residents in targeted neighborhoods to gain a better understanding of what residents know and how they feel about the City's recycling program.
- Developed an online survey to gauge resident understanding of the program and to solicit additional ideas. Survey garnered 4,250 responses.
- Coordinated Green Ambassadors/Volunteers to educate the public at four community events.
- Recruited, trained and scheduled recycling messengers like the Recycle Band (performed at seven events) and initiated a 2016 partnership with TRANSIT ARTS.
- Continued to educate residents and local leaders on recycling news and updates via five e-newsletters to approximately 4,374 recipients.
- Developed five social media images for City pages to highlight program milestones and provided helpful information and recycling tips throughout the year.
- Pursued partnerships with environmentally-focused organizations to leverage our recycling efforts and increase awareness of the program, distributing 5,000 yard waste bags to Habitat for Humanity and Rebuilding Together Central Ohio.
- Publicized RecyColumbus milestones, accomplishments and announcements in local media.

Focus Groups

The City of Columbus called on residents and developed promotional materials to promote nine focus groups across the City, with the intent of gaining a better understanding of what residents know and how they feel about the City's recycling and waste management programs. The information learned would be used to develop culturally appropriate messages and strategies to increase participation in the recycling and yard waste collection program.

The focus groups were held throughout July and August 2015 and meeting locations were representative of residents who recycled either 50-60% or 80-90% of the time. Community facilities were identified

within these areas and focus groups were scheduled in the early evening and weekends at times convenient for residents to participate.

Forty-three residents provided feedback during the focus groups. The majority of participants (58 percent) lived in their neighborhoods more than ten years, were female (61 percent), 60 years of age and older (53 percent), homeowners (86 percent), retired (60 percent) and smartphone users (72 percent). The majority (59 percent) had recycled before the City's program began. While 7 percent were not confident about what to recycle, 53 percent felt fairly confident and 40 percent felt very confident.

The overwhelming message was that participants really like the recycling program, especially because of the ease of use, convenience, consistency and the cost being included in their tax dollars. Other feedback was that many residents wished there was weekly pick-up vs bi-weekly and that there is still lingering confusion on what can and cannot go in the blue cart. We are working to address these concerns in updated communication materials.

Online Survey

The feedback from focus groups was used to shape an online survey. The survey asked residents about their confidence in recycling, motivations for recycling, what they like/don't like about the program, and what they would do to get other residents to recycle and recycle more often.

The survey garnered 4,250 responses. With more than 98 percent indicating they recycle, of which the majority said they recycle because they are concerned about the environment. Those residents who do not recycle indicated it is not convenient. More than 48 percent of residents surveyed were very confident about what to recycle, another 49 percent were fairly confident, and the remaining 2 percent (93 people) were not very confident about what to recycle.

When asked what residents liked about the City's recycling service, the top 3 answers (in order) were: It's easy, it's convenient, and it's picked up on a regular schedule. More than 93 percent of residents surveyed said they set their blue cart out every two weeks for collection, as opposed to once a month, never, etc. When asked how satisfied residents were with the frequency they hear about the City's recycling program, more than 36 percent said they were completely satisfied; more than 34 percent responded very satisfied; more than 21 percent said they were moderately satisfied; more than 5 percent said they were slightly satisfied; more than 2 percent said they were not at all satisfied. Residents indicated they would like to see information shared about recycling at Grocery Stores, Neighborhood Newsletters, Community Events, Festivals, Libraries and Ohio Bureau of Motor Vehicles.

The survey results overwhelmingly indicate residents recycle every two weeks, residents would like to see more information about what you can/can't recycle, and residents would recycle more if the City's recycling program accepted more items.

Partnerships

In the fall of 2015, RecyColumbus established a partnership with Habitat for Humanity of Central Ohio and Rebuilding Together Central Ohio to distribute 5,000 yard waste bags to families and communities in need of resources. In 2016, The City is discussing additional partnerships with environmentally-focused area organizations and businesses that can help spread the word about recycling in Columbus.

Local Media

The City is continuing to look for opportunities to gain positive media attention for RecyColumbus. In 2015, we issued two news releases pertaining to the recycling program:

- Recycling rates being the highest since 2013
- Distribution of 5,000 yard waste bags to Habitat for Humanity and Rebuilding Together of Central Ohio for in-need communities

Summary

The chasing arrows recycling symbol represent "Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle." Even with all of the City's measurements to quantify recycling, we have few viable methods to measure "reduce" and "reuse" activities, although we know people are engaged in all three activities. The more residents reduce and reuse, the more the recycling waste stream shrinks and diversion goals become increasingly harder to meet. The City will continue to strive to enhance our recycling participation rate.

While the residential recycling program has not yet met the desired diversion goals, our participation studies show that a strong majority of Columbus residents support recycling. We should also note the recycling program has enhanced our knowledge of our residents and neighborhoods, advanced our user friendly technologies, and forged new partnerships and friendships.