



LOCAL GOVERNMENT CASE STUDY: Transylvania County— PAYT Program

Unincorp. Population: 21,147

Households Served: 10,000

Solid Waste Collection: Drop-off

Recycling Collection: Drop-off Background

Transylvania County, nestled in the Blue Ridge Mountains, is a community rich in beauty and outdoor recreational opportunities. The county has an unincorporated population of 21,147. The towns of Brevard and Rosman have populations of 6,711 and 458 respectively. The county has established a solid waste reduction goal of 40 percent by 2001, and 50 percent by 2006. The solid waste recycling and disposal needs for the unincorporated population of the county are served by seven drop-off centers, a MSW landfill and a LCID landfill, all owned and operated by the county. The town of Brevard has its own solid waste and recycling program and the town of Rosman has a separate solid waste management program, and therefore these residents utilize the county drop-off centers to a lesser extent than other residents in the county. The following recyclables are accepted at all seven drop-off centers:

- Clear, brown and green glass;
- PETE, HDPE and mixed plastic bottles;
- Aluminum and steel cans;
- White goods and other metals;
- Newsprint, cardboard and mixed paper.

Residents sort the recyclables into laundry baskets and staff transfers the basket contents to roll-off containers. This practice minimizes contamination of the sorted materials. The county utilizes a mix of markets including a multi-materials processor, a mill, a scrap dealer and a paper processor.

Used oil and antifreeze are accepted at four of the drop-off centers and lead-acid batteries are accepted at five of the drop-off centers. The county also operates a mulching program using a tub grinder that is shared among several local governments. The Cooperative Extension service promotes a backyard-composting program and the county offers a junk-mail reduction program and a paint exchange.

Businesses throughout the county contract with GDS and, to a lesser extent, Waste Management Inc. for solid waste collection. The solid waste collected by GDS is taken to the Transylvania County landfill. The waste collected by Waste Management is taken elsewhere. Businesses have the option of bringing recyclables to one of the seven drop-off centers.

PAYT

Transylvania County's PAYT Program was approved by the County Commissioners in June 1994 and the program formally began on Feb. 15, 1995, after a six month education and implementation campaign.

The county sells stickers for \$1.25 each at the seven drop-off centers and 6 retail outlets (as of Spring 2000, the price has remained unchanged since program inception). Residents and businesses using the drop-off centers must place a sticker on each bag disposed. Bags cannot exceed 30 pounds. In addition, the drop-off center closest to Brevard accepts bags on a weight basis and charges 6 cents per pound. Bulky wastes from households can be taken to the landfill where they are weighed or taken to one of the drop-off centers where a combination flat fee and weight based fee is applied.

Prior to PAYT, residents paid \$65 per household and businesses paid \$100 annually regardless of the amount disposed. These fees were assessed on the annual tax bill. At the centers, staff sell tickets using a cash box which is reconciled against tickets sold. Since the program began, the county has had no problems with this system. The \$1.25 per sticker fee covers the cost of disposing of the bagged waste. The recycling operation is still paid for through the general fund.

Prior to implementation of PAYT, there was no fee charged at the landfill for trucks delivering waste. Businesses had previously been assessed the \$100 annual fee for waste disposal. On Feb. 15, 1995, the county dropped the \$100 fee and began charging \$40 per ton at the landfill. In 1998, the landfill tip fee was lowered to \$36 per ton.

Communication was the key to successful implementation of the program. The county held about six meetings per week for three months leading up to the February 1995 start date. Weekly articles appeared in the local papers and a letter was mailed to every property owner with a brochure explaining the program and included two complimentary stickers. Probably the most effective communication strategy the county employed was through the drop-off center staff. Since the drop-off sites, as in most rural areas, are also social gathering places, the drop-off center staff received the bulk of public comments and questions. The county recognized the important role drop-off center staff could play in successfully implementing PAYT. The solid waste director held regular after-work meetings with the staff during the implementation phase; dinner was provided and paid for by the county. During each meeting, the staff presented the questions and comments they received at the drop-off centers. Together they developed appropriate answers to the public's questions and comments, resulting in a well-honed and consistent message to the public.

Start-up costs for the PAYT program were approximately \$4,500. The county spent about \$2,500 for its initial purchase of stickers, direct mailings and other educational materials. An additional \$2,000 covered the overtime and meals for drop-off center staff during the after-work meetings.

Results

Although many residents objected strenuously to the change, now that it has been implemented, county officials believe that it would be even harder to take the program away from the residents. The residents now feel that the program is more equitable than before and genuinely seem to like the idea of only paying for what they dispose. Furthermore, the drop-off centers had previously received some waste from residents outside of Transylvania County. Now, everyone bringing waste to the sites must pay, which makes the program more equitable.

Traffic at the drop-off centers has decreased since implementing PAYT. Previously many residents went to the site with every small bag of trash. With PAYT, residents pack their bags full and deliver them less often. Residents also spend more time at the site during each visit, both buying stickers and sorting recyclables.

As of FY98/99, recycling has increased 70 percent and solid waste disposal has decreased 39 percent since the program's inception.

Illegal Disposal

The County's solid waste director doesn't believe that illegal disposal has increased since implementing PAYT. During the program education and promotion phase, prior to the implementation date, the county emphasized stepped-up enforcement and prosecution for illegal disposal violations. The county budgeted for an additional enforcement officer, but found that the position was not needed and eliminated the position prior to hiring an officer. To ensure that the public understands the consequences of illegal disposal in the county, all enforcement measures have been highly publicized since PAYT was implemented.

The county made another important decision, which probably reduced illegal disposal after PAYT was implemented. In every public meeting and in other announcements, the county urged its residents to do "spring cleaning" before PAYT was implemented to avoid the per bag cost. This resulted in a huge increase in traffic and waste just prior to the start date. Consequently, the first week of PAYT was the slowest ever at the collection sites.