



## Nine Tips to Help Your Recycling Program

The global economic and credit crisis have had severe impacts on manufacturers worldwide and, by extension, on the markets for the commodities that manufacturers consume, including recyclables. As the economy works toward recovery, with the expected improvement of material prices, here are nine tips to help your recycling program weather the current conditions.

1. **Integrated Solid Waste Management Budget** – View your entire solid waste management budget as one item. While it may not be easy to find a source of savings in one component (e.g., recycling), it may be easy to find savings in another component (e.g., solid waste collection). This may be especially true if some components of your program are contracted and others are operated in-house.
2. **Fuel Surcharge(s)** – Due to recent high fuel prices, many local governments that contract for services have experienced fuel surcharge expenses in recent years. Fuel prices have fallen steadily since the summer of 2008. Review all collection and hauling contracts and invoices to ensure that you are no longer paying fuel surcharges.
3. **Recycling Processing Fees** – Many local governments that contract for recycling collection services are now being billed pass-through processing fees by their haulers. These processing fees are a natural result of current market conditions; however, it is a smart idea to contact your hauler's processor to verify what they are being charged. While you have them on the phone, ask them what they expect conditions to look like over the next few months.
4. **Disposal Tax Revenues** – All local governments that contract for or directly provide solid waste services will begin receiving quarterly distributions from the \$2 per ton disposal tax that was implemented in July 2008. With few exceptions, almost every local government will receive more revenue back than was paid due to the tax. These funds must be used for solid waste programs and services – this includes recycling processing fees.
5. **Twice Per Week and Rear Yard Garbage Collection** – In 2002, 90 local governments in North Carolina provided rear yard collection, twice per week collection of solid waste or some combination of both. As of 2008 only 50 of the 414 solid waste collection programs in the state offered some level of these services. Moving away from rear yard and/or twice per week collection can result in substantial savings in labor, worker compensation and equipment O&M costs. In some cases you may be able to increase the level of automation used at the same time resulting in longer-term savings through improved collection efficiency. Many large and small communities in North Carolina have proven that weekly curbside collection of solid waste provides the level of service that meets the needs of residents.
6. **Collection Efficiency** – In most programs, 60 to 80 percent of the costs associated with solid waste management are collection related costs. A focus on collection efficiency - whether your program is curbside or drop-off - can create savings and represents a better focus than trying to minimize processing costs for recycling. If you collect curbside, look to improve routing and off-route times. Annexations can often result in ineffective routing if not properly addressed. If you use a drop-off collection system, review your weights. Make sure that you are sending

out consistently full loads of solid waste and recyclables. Whether you contract for hauling or operate in-house, every time a load leaves a site, there are costs involved.

7. **Explore Commingling** – Although you will likely incur increased processing fees when sending commingled loads to a processor rather than source separated loads, you may be surprised to find that it is very often a less expensive option. There are often opportunities to add additional acceptable materials for recycling as well as to reduce labor and equipment costs. If you operate a drop-off site for recycling you may experience savings in transportation, container rental, swap-out charges, etc. Moving toward single or dual-stream collection can also open the door to increased compaction (curbside and drop-off) resulting in increased transportation efficiency and/or longer on-route time for curbside collection vehicles.
8. **Educate the Public** – Part of the cost associated with processing recyclable materials is due to improper materials in loads sent for processing. Often these are materials such as plastic bags and unacceptable plastics and papers from residents that are trying to do the right thing. Most processing facilities experience residue rates of 10 to 20 percent. This residue is comprised of both recyclable and non-recyclable materials and generally is disposed of at a cost to the processor. Make a concerted effort to educate your residents about what to include and what not to include when recycling. A good place to start may be to ensure that a list of acceptable and unacceptable materials is prominently available on your local government's Web site.
9. **Long Term Strength of Recycling Markets** – Although it is unlikely that we will see anytime soon the historically high prices for materials that we experienced last summer; most experts agree that markets will begin to rebound this year. As U.S. and foreign production of goods increases, the price paid for recyclable commodities should begin to climb. Because of substantial energy, cost and resource savings, the trend for manufacturers around the world to rely increasingly on recovered materials is expected to continue. For example, Coke's new PET recycling plant is expected to consume 130 million pounds of plastic bottles to make new bottles. Improving the efficiency of your recycling program in down times will pay big dividends later.