

■ Recycling in Cyberspace



Curbing organic waste, part 2

by Roger Guttentag

The first part of this column topic, published in the June 2010 issue of *Resource Recycling*, covered general web references on residential curbside collection of source-separated organics (SSO). If you are not familiar with this topic, then I recommend you first consult those sources prior to checking out the websites I will be discussing in this month's column. The focus of this brief survey will be on regional and municipal SSO programs that have been implemented either as pilots or as full-scale operations, with close attention being paid to those that have published online data on their collection activities.

Figuring it out

SSO collections, unlike the well-established curbside systems for paper and containers, do not have the same extensive track record or knowledge base of best practices that can be consulted. This has led to the decision by many local jurisdictions to test the viability of SSO programs through the creation of pilot projects, in order to test the efficacy of any recommended collection methods. Fortunately, the following communities have published data from their pilots:

Capital Regional District (CRD)

This 4,000-home pilot project, conducted by the CRD between October 2006 and December 2008, was based on co-collection of SSO and mixed waste using a split-body collection vehicle. The goal of the pilot was to evaluate a wide range of program variables, such as collection frequency, container types, public outreach and participation methods, costs and diversion rates. While information on total SSO tonnage collected was provided, it was not presented on a per-household basis.

Linden Hills and East Calhoun Neighborhoods

Pilot programs were conducted in the Linden Hills and East Calhoun neighbor-

hoods of Minneapolis to test a number of parameters, such as the efficacy of collection and public methods and the use of an opt-in participation approach. Between July and November 2009, weekly SSO collections averaged about 11 – 13 pounds per household – based on a 70-percent setout rate.

Regional District of Nanaimo

A pilot collection project for 2,000 households — located on three routes in rural, suburban and urban portions of this British Columbia district — was conducted from October 2007 through October 2008. According to the published information for this program, food waste collections averaged roughly 4.5 to 5.5 pounds per household, per week.

State College, Pennsylvania

Thirty-five gallon carts were distributed to 584 homes in January 2010. And, according to the first progress report, food waste collections averaged seven pounds per cart

over the first four weeks of the program.

Up and running

There are residential SSO programs throughout North America that have been operating on a community-wide basis for more than several years, and some of the more notable examples are listed below. Each of the websites provides information on how to participate, what materials are acceptable and the type of services that are provided. Below are some aspects of the sites that I would like to highlight.

City of Ottawa

This is probably one of the best-designed websites that I have seen in terms of intelligent use of Flash; a well-organized menu and navigational structure; and clear informational presentations aimed at the general public, teachers and students. Site content includes very helpful videos and a very entertaining game that does a great job of helping you to understand which items (e.g., banana peels, kitty litter, aero-

Web Address Directory

CRD – Composting and organics recycling
City of Denver – Pilot organic waste collection program
City of Dubuque – Food scrap recycling
City of Portland – Food scrap pilot
Linden Hills – Interim SSO report
Linden Hills – Organics pilot collection
Metro Vancouver – Food waste recycling
City of Ottawa – Green bin program
Regional District of Nanaimo
SPU – Food and yard waste collection
SPU – Residential Organics Reports
SWANCC – Barrington pilot organics recycling program
State College – Food waste composting
StopWaste.org – Food scrap recycling

www.crd.bc.ca/waste/organics
<http://tinyurl.com/denverorganics>
<http://tinyurl.com/dubuquefoodscraps>
<http://tinyurl.com/portlandfoodscraps>
<http://tinyurl.com/lindenhillreport>
<http://tinyurl.com/lhorganics>
<http://tinyurl.com/vancouverfoodwaste>
www.greenbinottawa.ca
<http://tinyurl.com/Nanaimoorganics>
<http://tinyurl.com/seattlefoodyardwaste>
<http://tinyurl.com/seattleorganics>
<http://tinyurl.com/swanccorganics>
<http://tinyurl.com/statecollegefoodwaste>
<http://tinyurl.com/stopwasteorganics>

sol cans or magazines) go into the various program containers provided to households. The site is also integrated with such social networking channels as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter.

Seattle Public Utilities (SPU)

The SPU site is not as slick as the City of Ottawa's, but one thing it does have is Residential Organics Reports. These reports, published since 2006, cover yard and food waste, as well as soiled paper, collected through curbside accounts and from self-haulers. The reports also provide pounds of organic waste recovered, per curbside account; however, there is no further detail on what the percentages are for specific organic waste categories.

StopWaste.org

StopWaste.org has a really interesting online report detailing an August 2009 public opinion telephone survey of 600 Alameda County residents, regarding curbside collections of food scrap. The responses are matched against a comparable survey (in sample size) conducted in 2007 and a 2004 baseline survey of approximately 800 county residents. Residents were asked questions about such issues as their awareness of the program, what wastes they recycled, which methods were most effective in getting the program's messages to them, and their understanding of the reasons for food waste recycling.

Places to watch

There are new SSO pilot collection programs that are still emerging, so often, in fact, there is little information about them aside from the usual descriptions of what they intend to do. Nonetheless, it may be worthwhile to keep an eye on the following communities to see what new developments they'll post online as their programs evolve:

- City of Denver
- City of Dubuque, Iowa
- City of Portland, Oregon
- Metro Vancouver, British Columbia
- Solid Waste Agency of Northern Cook County (SWANCC) – Village of Barrington, Illinois

Final thoughts

Other than construction and demolition debris, non-yard organic wastes represent the last big untapped vein of potentially recyclable municipal waste. Data from SSO collection programs demonstrate that they offer a new effective tool for significantly increasing municipal waste recovery rates. However, they do require new capital and operating cost investments to get off the ground. Hopefully, this will happen despite the challenges presented by an economy still trying to shake off the effects of the Great Recession.

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