



We use the term “waste flows” because it does an admirable job of conveying a vivid image of materials moving within our economy from their sources to users and then on to final recycling or disposal destinations. Statistical descriptions of these flows usually focus on product types, consuming sectors and processing or disposal facilities.

However, there are waste flows that are not adequately profiled by this data but are just as important to understand as part of our efforts to reduce our consumptive waste outputs. These are the material flows that are associated with the human movement through public spaces. For this reason, programs to develop, promote and improve public-space recycling have been increasing steadily over the last decade.

Public-space recycling is a large umbrella term that covers a wide range of programs that fall into three large categories. The first would be events such as street fairs, festivals and parades. The second category covers scheduled events in permanent facilities such as sports stadiums and concert halls. The last category – and the focus of this month’s column – is public-space recycling collections that occur where commerce, culture, pedestrian traffic and all sorts of social interactions intersect. Examples include downtown shopping areas, public squares, urban parks and waterfronts.

While a number of websites are devoted to exploring cultivation of vibrant public spaces, a good starting point is the site of New York-based Project for Public Spaces. Head to that site to develop a broad understanding of the important roles public spaces play in modern society.

## Recycling in public – part 1

by Roger Guttentag

### Best practices and technical guidance

Of course, it’s easy to also delve more deeply into the specifics of recovery of material in the away-from-home arena. The recent growth of public-space recycling programs has provided a wealth of information on effective practices. Some good examples are publications that can be downloaded from the Recycle More North Carolina and the America Recycles Day websites. Another useful reference is a Keep America Beautiful presentation given at the 2015 Indiana Recycling Coalition conference. Some of the key points they make include the following:

**Know your service area.** Compile data on how much material and which product types may be collected. Also, understand pedestrian traffic patterns that occur during a 24-hour cycle.

**Don’t isolate recycling.** This is often phrased as “twin the bin” to emphasize the need for user convenience and accessibility by placing recycling and trash containers together. This also means placing containers where they can be seen but not obscuring recycling container visibility by surrounding them with too many trash receptacles.

**Container design matters.** Recycling collection containers should look different than trash bins and harness the creative use of physical design, color and labeling. The container’s design should also reinforce its function as a recycling collector through features such as restrictive lid openings.

**Educate your public.** Outreach messages should be used to remind the public that recycling collection is available and should educate consumers about which materials are acceptable in the system.

**Monitor and evaluate.** Make sure the containers are serviced regularly and the area around them is kept clean. Data should be gathered and analyzed so that program managers know how much is collected within specific time periods, the type of materials that are recovered and the problems encountered (contamination, for example).

It’s also worth reviewing a recent joint survey from Keep America Beautiful and

Recycle Away, the results of which were covered in a presentation at the Federation of New York State Solid Waste Associations 2014 Conference. The presentation provides data on responses to a wide range of questions such as type of materials collected, collection locations, amounts collected, co-location with trash bins and service schedules.

Finally, a detailed public-space recycling guidance manual developed by U.K.-based WRAP can be downloaded from the organization’s website. The manual is organized into eight chapters that go over many of the essential issues to be addressed by public-space recycling programs – these include the population to be served, key program design issues, overcoming participation barriers and managing costs. While it is oriented to the needs of U.K. communities, the manual also provides a number of ideas and recommendations that could prove helpful to North American localities.

### Some public-space recycling examples

The following are presentations that have been posted online within the last several years on public-space recycling programs that have been implemented within the U.S.:

**Austin, Texas.** This 2015 presentation gives an update on the Department of Parks & Recreation recycling program developments. It includes some discussion of public-space recycling already in place, implementation costs and next steps to be taken.

**Dakota County, Minn.** This presentation gives a detailed overview of an assessment of public-space recycling activities in the county’s park system. Some of the slides on this assessment, such as the recycling containers and signage used, are of particular interest.

**Palm Beach County, Fla.** This 2013 presentation summarizes the results from a pilot public-space recycling program conducted by the Palm Beach County

Solid Waste Authority and the American Beverage Association in five municipalities. The findings include beverage container composition data for waste litter before and after pilot program implementation and public-space recycling collections.

**Washington D.C.** A presentation out of the nation's capital describes the early public-space recycling activities for the period of 2008 through 2010 and the structure of the Dream Machine Partnership as of 2012 between a local business improvement district, PepsiCo and the Washington D.C. Department of Public Works. It also provides data on recycling container locations and materials recovered.

## Next month

It is possible for a public-space recycling program to follow all the best practice recommendations on a technical level and still not perform well. Such struggles are often a result of the core public-space recycling challenge: a behavioral inclination among many individuals to treat all discards as trash. For this reason, next month's column will focus on how paying attention to behavioral and design factors to help effectively send a message that says, "Hello,

## Web Address Directory

America Recycles Day – Public Space Recycling Resources	<a href="http://tinyurl.com/ARD-Public">tinyurl.com/ARD-Public</a>
City of Austin Parks & Recreation Department recycling program	<a href="http://tinyurl.com/Austin-Public">tinyurl.com/Austin-Public</a>
New York Solid Waste Associations best practices in public-space recycling	<a href="http://tinyurl.com/NY-Public">tinyurl.com/NY-Public</a>
Keep America Beautiful presentation on public-space recycling	<a href="http://tinyurl.com/KAB-Public">tinyurl.com/KAB-Public</a>
Washington D.C. public-space recycling	<a href="http://tinyurl.com/DC-Public">tinyurl.com/DC-Public</a>
Palm Beach County, Fla. public-space recycling pilot	<a href="http://tinyurl.com/Palm-Public">tinyurl.com/Palm-Public</a>
Project for Public Spaces	<a href="http://pps.org">pps.org</a>
Dakota County, Minn. public-space recycling presentation	<a href="http://tinyurl.com/MN-Public">tinyurl.com/MN-Public</a>
Recycle More N.C. – Recycling on the Go	<a href="http://tinyurl.com/NC-Public">tinyurl.com/NC-Public</a>
WRAP – Recycle on the Go Technical Guidance	<a href="http://tinyurl.com/WRAP-Public">tinyurl.com/WRAP-Public</a>

I'm a recycling container. Please use me correctly!" We'll also explore whether that clear message really does create change among those streaming through public spaces.

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