

Single Stream Recycling

What *You* Need to Know

Is single stream right for your town? Ask lots of questions.

This fact sheet was designed to help YOU help your City or Town decide if single stream recycling is the best way to recycle. There are a lot of questions that you need to ask to make that important decision.

Let's take a look at why single stream recycling exists today and if it is right for you.

Collection

Solid Waste & Recycling collection companies wanted an easier and cheaper way to pickup recyclables especially in densely populated areas of Maine. Eliminating curbside sorting should reduce municipal collection costs. Here's how it works:

- Hauler maintains less equipment – no sorter truck is needed as a garbage packer truck can collect both trash and recyclables
- Reduced idling at the curb and fewer trips to the transfer point or MRF (Material Recovery Facility) means lower fuel consumption.
- Faster, more efficient collection means more households in a given day perhaps improving schedules or frequency.
- With increased recycling tonnage comes a decrease in trash tonnage making curbside trash pickup cheaper too.

But be aware of a factor unique to Maine that may make single stream recycling more expensive than your current sort-based system. Recycling materials collected in a single, non-sorted stream, require processing in material recovery facilities (MRF). The only Maine-based MRF is in Portland and there are several others in Massachusetts. Hauling your recycling materials longer distances for processing may increase your freight costs

WHEN SINGLE STREAM RECYCLING IS PROPOSED IN YOUR COMMUNITY, ASK THESE QUESTIONS:

- How much money will the town save over current collection practices? If an increase, why?
- Where will the recycling materials be taken and at what cost?
- How will changes in fuel prices influence those freight costs?

More recycling

Increasing collection efficiency is great but municipalities also want to increase recycling rates and divert more trash. Single stream collection usually includes a broader list of materials that can be recycled. Coupled with the elimination of sorting, this makes recycling more attractive to the public and more people will participate.

WHEN SINGLE STREAM RECYCLING IS PROPOSED IN YOUR COMMUNITY, ASK THESE QUESTIONS:

- How much more recycling tonnage will be collected?
- Can you supply our town with data from other cities and towns that share our population density and recycling program make up?
- Are these facts available online and can they be substantiated by a third party?
- Where will the recycling materials be taken?
- When the materials are sorted at the MRF, what percentage ends up as garbage? Where does that go and is there a disposal cost?
- Who will you sell the sorted recycling materials to? Do you have long term agreements with them? Have they ever been shut out of a mill and why? How often is material not suitable for the mill or downgraded in price?
- Has any town ever changed from single stream back to sorted collection?
- What if the system does not increase recycling tonnage or provide the desired results? What is the cost to change back and is that even possible? Are there any guaranteed levels of participation?

All towns are different and the results will vary. You should investigate claims of dollar savings and increased tonnages that sound too good to be true. Get more than one estimate, two to three if possible. Investigate references.

Material Revenue

With a sort-based system, your town may be realizing a revenue stream from the sale of the recycling materials. To do this your town must process the recycling materials into bales for shipment. This means that your town owns and operates its own transfer station or contracts with another town or company to perform this service. There are costs to do this work. Compare those costs and revenues with the costs and revenues under a single stream program.

WHEN SINGLE STREAM RECYCLING IS PROPOSED IN YOUR COMMUNITY, ASK THESE QUESTIONS:

- What, if any, revenue will the town receive for the recycling materials?
- Does the municipal recycling program get funded by existing recycling revenues? If yes, how will it be funded in a no-revenue system?
- Will there be a minimum paid or charged for the contract? How much is it?
- What will be the price per ton and will it be locked for the contract period?
- What are other towns in the area paying?

Efficiency

One of the primary goals of switching to a single stream system is an increase in the efficiency of the recycling program

WHEN SINGLE STREAM RECYCLING IS PROPOSED IN YOUR COMMUNITY, ASK THESE QUESTIONS:

- How will the environment benefit from single stream?
- Is hauling distance a factor and what happens if fuel goes up or down a lot?
- How many tons can be hauled in a container?

PAYT

Your town could see a 10-20% increase in recycling tonnage with single stream recycling, BUT...

Implementing a Pay-As-You-Throw (PAYT) system could send your tonnage soaring!

Single stream recycling offers a positive incentive for residents to recycle more or just plain recycle, by eliminating the sorting. PAYT works well as a disincentive – residents pay for trash disposal while recycling is free. The two systems complement each other and municipalities that have done both have seen much greater increases in recycling tonnages

WHEN SINGLE STREAM RECYCLING IS PROPOSED IN YOUR COMMUNITY, ASK THESE QUESTIONS:

- Should a PAYT system be implemented at the same time?
- Is there political support to get past the initial hurdle of resident apprehension?
- Can PAYT revenue be used to replace lost recycling revenue to support the services offered?
- How can curbside collection or transfer station dropoff of PAYT trash work with a single stream recycling system?

Summary

The switch to single stream is the biggest change to recycling since recycling started. It's a big decision for any community:

- How will residents be educated about the new system?
- How will changes in costs and revenues be handled?
- What municipally-paid services will be offered or changed?
- Will a transfer station need to be built or modified?
- Will recycling tonnages really increase?
- Will trash disposal costs really decrease?
- If single stream is adopted and doesn't work, can we go back to the old sort system?
- Will residents be happy with an expanded list of recyclable items?
- Will the environment really benefit?

WHEN SINGLE STREAM RECYCLING IS PROPOSED IN YOUR COMMUNITY, ASK LOTS OF QUESTIONS.

For more information on all kinds of recycling questions and problems, call the group that knows the business:

MAINE RESOURCE RECOVERY ASSOCIATION
207-942-6772
www.mrra.net