

SINGLE STREAM PROMOTION AND EDUCATION

Discussion Paper and Questions for Best Practices Manual Conference Calls August 18, 2005

Promotional and Educational Materials Discussion

This Section includes a discussion of the impacts of promotional and educational materials on participation and contamination rates.

Outreach Materials

The first step in getting residents to recycle the right items with the proper preparation is at the very beginning of the program. The point at which everything is new, or 'expanded/upgraded' is the easiest time to get residents to pay attention to what it is that you want them to do.

There have been programs that don't change anything, but announce that changes have been made, to get their residents to pay closer attention.

There are multiple techniques that encourage correct recycling behavior by the generators. The goal is to get more residents to participate, increase the amount of recyclable materials that they separate for recycling, and properly prepare the materials that are recycled.

Targeting the message to your community is a very important step. It is not uncommon for communities to have neighborhoods with different cultural or demographic features, so that the message that appeals to one area may not be meaningful in another.

Generally, the simpler the message, the easier it is to get the desired result. People are used to taking in news in 'sound-bite' form. You only get to say a few words before the listener is ready to move on. Those first few words are critical to whether you can get them to continue to pay attention.

And of course graphics are worth thousands of words.

For printed materials, there is always a debate about getting all of the information (lots of text) in a single document as compared with having an attractive piece that encourages the viewer to get more information from another source (e.g. call or look at our web page). And humor may help convey a serious message.

Once the message is delivered, many communities want to measure the impacts of their efforts. This is particularly difficult because there are so many factors in play and the time horizon may not be immediate. It may also be useful to try to evaluate the impacts on different segments of the population.

In addition to the actual message, the promotions must match the complexity of the program design. One feature of the San Diego collection program is that they only accept the basic material types and so it is easy to let the residents know that they only want clean paper and beverage containers in the recycling carts.

Which features work best in individual situations?

Feedback Materials

Once the resident has placed recyclables out for collection, there should be a mechanism for communicating the quality of their participation back to them.

In most communities, if a resident overloads their garbage can the collector leaves a 'Non-Collection Notice' explaining why the garbage was not collected – such as “your can was too heavy.”

Collectors of recyclables generally tend to be reluctant to discourage recycling, so fewer communities use this technique for recyclables, but it can be an important step in providing quality materials to the processor.

The notice should explain precisely why the set out materials do not meet the goals of the recycling program and encourage the resident to continue to participate, but do it right!

Examples of different promotional and educational materials

Chula Vista white (good) and orange (needs improvement) tags
Palo Alto blue (for recycling) tag

Elements for Discussion

1. How can we best communicate to the residents what it is that we want them to do?
2. How do we get them to care more about recycling?
3. How can we best reinforce positive behavior?
4. How can we best get them to change negative behavior?
5. What is the role of the City in communicating with the residents?
6. What is the role of the recycling collector in communicating with the residents?
7. How do we keep our story interesting to the media?
8. What responsibility do we have to share the negatives with our residents? [For example, dirty plastic bags may end up in the landfill and are probably not going to be recycled].

9. How important is it to explain to the public WHY recycling is important? Some people suggest that public education should be shifted from HOW to WHY – do you agree?
10. Should the approach of public education be different for various ethnic and economic groups within a community? If so, what kinds of differences have been successful?