



RECYCLING IN ONTARIO COUNTY

by

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SUMMARY

Since October 1, 1988, Ontario County has operated a county-wide voluntary drop-off recycling program. In 1989 source-separated curbside recycling for half of the County's households, County Office paper recycling, and institutional recycling for some schools and colleges were added to the program. Newspaper, corrugated cardboard, high-density plastic, clear glass, and aluminum and steel cans are recycled.

Ontario County plans to extend full recycling programs to all households, institutions, and commercial and industrial facilities. In addition, a Material Recovery Facility (MRF), a County Household Hazardous Waste Day, and composting programs are in various stages of planning or study.

The County, rather than the municipalities, has taken full responsibility for the recycling program, maximizing the use of the private sector and fixing costs and revenues where possible. The program has achieved the encouraging results of an approximate 5% reduction in the waste stream due to recycling and a 77% compliance rate on curbside recycling.

BACKGROUND

In 1980 the New York State Legislature gave the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) the responsibility for preparing a state Solid Waste Management Plan. The first Plan was completed in April of 1986, and the State Legislature responded by passing the Solid Waste Management Act of 1988 (1). This law identifies four methods of solid waste management, in order of priority, to be implemented by municipalities:

1. Reduction of solid waste generation (with a 1997 goal of 10%).
2. Reuse and recycling (with a mandate for statewide recycling by 1992 and a goal of 40% recycled material by 1997).
3. Generation of energy from solid waste in an environmentally acceptable manner (i.e., incineration).
4. Landfilling.

In addition, each municipality must submit a Solid Waste Management Plan to the DEC by April 1991.

Since the early 1980's Ontario County has been pursuing environmentally acceptable solid waste management alternatives. As early as 1981 the County began to investigate the feasibility of a regional waste-to-energy incinerator. Enlisting the support of adjacent Wayne, Seneca, and Yates Counties, by 1986 Ontario County called for the formation of the Western Finger Lakes Solid Waste Management Authority. Formed by an act of the State Legislature in September 1986, the Authority's intent was to take a regional approach to solid waste management with the main goal of building a waste-to-energy incinerator. In February 1988 Ontario County supervisors, responding to local concerns about the largely unknown health hazards of incineration, resigned from the Authority (2).¹ Ontario County has pursued its own recycling program, which is heralded by local and state officials as one of the most progressive and successful programs in the state (3-6).

RECYCLING IN ONTARIO COUNTY (7)

Ontario County's recycling project presently boasts an approximate 5% reduction in the waste stream (or 3600-4000 tons per year) (3, 8). Though the state goal is 40% reduction of the waste stream due to recycling by 1997, Ontario County's figures are considered significant; for example, though they support a regional approach to waste management and the Western Finger Lakes Solid Waste Management Authority, DEC officials admit that Ontario County's recycling program is one of the first implemented and that both the amount of waste being recycled and the level of public participation are impressive for a fledgling program (3). In the last few months Ontario County has demonstrated its commitment to recycling by 1) creating a Solid Waste Committee of the Board of Supervisors, 2) establishing the Office of Recycling and

¹RCSI will provide more information on Ontario County's relationship with the Authority in an upcoming bulletin entitled "The Breakup of the Western Finger Lakes Solid Waste Management Authority".

hiring a Recycling Manager and an Account Clerk Typist, and 3) creating an annual County Recycling Budget of approximately \$1.2 million (7).

Voluntary Drop-off Recycling Program (7)

On October 1, 1988, Ontario County implemented the first phase of its recycling program--a county-wide voluntary drop-off program. This program was made available for the approximately 100,000 residents (or 35,000 households) in the 646 square mile county which includes 27 municipalities. Based on a waste stream characterization study and relative ease of handling--ease of source separation, collection, and actual recycling were taken into account--it was decided that newspaper, corrugated cardboard, high-density plastic, clear glass, and aluminum and steel cans would be accepted for recycling. Citizens take recyclables to drop-off centers located in each of 16 towns as well as several schools. Recyclables also may be deposited at transfer centers, sites where garbage or recyclables are transferred on their way to the landfill or to market. Here the County provides enclosed, weather-protected containers for recyclables. Ontario County (rather than the municipalities) has assumed all responsibility for the program: financing, coordinating municipalities, advertising, and removing and replacing containers.

Contamination of recycling bins with nonrecyclable items is a problem that jeopardizes the drop-off program. If a load of material is too contaminated, it may be rejected by Modern Recycling of Canada, the company presently under contract to Ontario County to collect the recyclables, or by the firms who buy the material from Modern Recycling for reuse; if this is the case, the load intended for recycling must be landfilled (9). However, the towns and County have made progress towards solving this problem. Many towns have hired attendants to monitor the drop-off sites, and the County has mailed residents information explaining what items may be recycled. In addition, the County has begun a grading program, where every bin of recyclables receives a grade of A through F depending upon its contamination level. Towns consistently have improved their grades since the program was instituted (8).

In an attempt to fix its costs and revenues to the greatest extent possible, Ontario County has maximized the use of the private sector in the recycling program. For example, the County bids 1) the provision of the recycling containers and 2) the collection and ultimate disposition of the recyclable materials by private vendors. Fixed rental rates on recyclable containers and a fixed cost per trip to haulers who pick up recyclables are obtained. In addition to receiving a fixed guaranteed revenue for each ton of recyclables collected, Ontario County leaves the

primary responsibility for finding markets for recyclables with the private sector (presently Modern Recycling) which, at this stage, is much more adept than the County at finding those markets. This success is demonstrated by the fact that, according to the Solid Waste Committee, Ontario is the only county in the state that gets \$5 per ton for newspapers (3).

Curbside Collection Program (7)

On May 1, 1989, Ontario County began a source-separated curbside recycling program in the cities of Geneva and Canandaigua, the villages of Victor, Shortsville, Manchester, Clifton Springs, and Phelps, and the major subdivisions of Farmington. Representing 17,000 or almost half of Ontario County's households, these communities were selected because they contain the greatest population density and already have curbside collection as part of their public works function or under contract to private haulers. The combined voluntary drop-off and curbside recycling programs provide services throughout the County consistent with the current collection process for any given municipality. This promotes municipal cooperation and public participation by minimizing inconvenience and confusion.

The operational philosophy for curbside recycling is consistent with that for voluntary drop-off. Ontario provides the equipment (it has purchased two recycling trucks and one recycling trailer), which is leased to the private vendor providing the curbside collection service; in this case, Ontario County has contracted with Modern Recycling of Canada to run the curbside program (8). The County's contract with Modern Recycling specifies that recyclables are to be picked up curbside once a week--preferably in conjunction with the regular collection process--and deposited at drop-off centers or transfer facilities where recyclables are transferred to trucks that take them to market. The program is considered a success with 77% citizen compliance at least once a month (3).

Office Paper Recycling (7)

On June 1, 1989, Ontario County implemented an office paper recycling program in County offices. Employees in all departments deposit recyclable office paper in special recycling containers located throughout County offices. As part of the general maintenance effort, the whole or shredded paper is collected and deposited at the Association for Retarded Citizens (ARC) building, where, by contract, the paper is separated by type--black and white, colored, computer--and prepared for shipment to market.

In conjunction with the County Office Program, Ontario County has implemented institutional office paper recycling in 17 school buildings (representing 7 school districts),

the Community College of the Finger Lakes (CCFL), and Hobart and William Smith College. In addition, some schools have begun to recycle other materials such as cardboard and metal cans (8). Recyclable materials collected at these institutions are transported to the nearest drop-off center where they enter the County's recyclable waste stream.

Recycling for Businesses (8)

The Office of Recycling is currently working on a program where interested businesses will be given the opportunity to recycle corrugated cardboard, computer paper, and office paper. Businesses periodically may drop off their cardboard and paper at four or five tractor-trailers that will be placed around the County by a private company. Since the company will supply the tractor-trailers in exchange for the recyclables it collects, the service will be made available at no charge to participating businesses or the County. This program will be offered in the very near future.

Scrap Metal and 'White Goods' Collection

For the month of September 1990 Ontario County sponsored a scrap metal and 'white goods' collection program. Two-hundred eighteen tons of scrap metal (such as car parts, furnaces, and metal desks) and 'white goods' (metal appliances such as stoves and refrigerators) were dropped at five transfer stations throughout the County. The metal was collected by a scrap metal dealer, who baled, compacted, and transported it to a company in Syracuse. Again, the service was made available at no charge to residents, towns, or the County, since the dealer provided the service in exchange for the metal collected (8, 11).

Education

In 1990 to augment its own advertising, Ontario County contracted with the Cornell Cooperative Extension to provide educational services on recycling. In June 1990 the Cooperative Extension of Ontario County hired Edith Davey (as support extension specialist for solid waste management education) to 1) offer educational programs to schools, businesses, municipalities, community groups, and other county residents, and 2) compile a library of educational materials to be made available to the same groups (12). In 1991 Ontario County will hire its own recycling specialist to provide the same services. The specialist will work out of the Office of Recycling and will assist Recycling Manager Thomas Bourne with outreach and program implementation (8).

RECYCLING'S FUTURE IN ONTARIO COUNTY (8)

According to Thomas Bourne, Ontario County's Recycling Manager, the County has extensive plans for expanding its recycling program. In the summer of 1990 the Solid Waste Committee of the Board of Supervisors began studying options on how best to expand services to the County and comply with the September 1992 mandatory recycling deadline. One of the latest proposals calls for eliminating the drop-off program and extending complete curbside recycling services to the entire County--all households, condominiums, apartments, schools, and nonprofit organizations. Various programs that blend curbside and drop-off recycling also are being considered. Workshops to study these and other options, including those for commercial and industrial facilities, are ongoing.

The County is also considering construction of a materials recovery facility (MRF), which would increase recyclables' value by separating, baling, and loading them for market. The MRF would give the County the option to market its own recyclables; presently, Modern Recycling, under contract to Ontario County, collects and markets the recyclables. A decision for building the MRF is yet to be made, but the Ontario County Capital Plan approved in November 1990 allows the County to bond \$1 million for a MRF in 1991 (8, 14).

Other future plans include sponsoring a County Household Hazardous Waste Drop-off Day in 1991 and investigating the feasibility of composting as part of the recycling program.

CONCLUSION

In two years, Ontario County has successfully implemented varied and innovative recycling programs resulting in a significant impact on the waste stream and wide-spread citizen compliance. These existing programs, along with promising plans for expanding recycling in Ontario County, demonstrate that goals set by the Solid Waste Management Act of 1988 are attainable.

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