

As gas prices go up, it is in everyone’s interest to look for inefficiencies in how fuel is used. A case in point is Washtenaw County’s waste collection system. Did you know that the vast majority of the County is covered by a subscription-based system in which up to six different trash trucks cover the same territory? In this arrangement, residents contract individually with waste haulers of their own choosing. This sounds good but it can result in great inefficiencies in service. It not only wastes fuel and pollutes the air unnecessarily with diesel fumes, it also speeds up deterioration of our roads.

Because garbage trucks are so much heavier than cars, their effect on roads is much worse. The Minnesota Department of Transportation (MDT) estimates that one garbage truck trip is equivalent to 1000 car trips. So communities with six waste haulers are adding a load to their roads equal to 6000 car trips per week.

The Washtenaw County Residential Solid Waste Profile and Assessment Report analyzed current trash and recycling data County-wide. The Report shows that not only are our subscription-based collection systems inefficient, they are expensive: \$180 to \$264 a year for minimal services, while our single hauler systems charge only \$118 to \$168 for a multitude of services. The Report recommends that a single hauler system be instituted regionally.

Regional programs allow services to be delivered more efficiently. For instance, the Western Washtenaw Recycling Authority (WWRA) manages to achieve a recycling rate ten times higher than do the County’s communities that don’t participate in any regional recycling.

A regional single-hauler system would have many benefits:

Lower cost: Residents pay 35-50% less per year for single-hauler services.

More services: Single hauler systems in Washtenaw County provide an array of services such as recycling, yard waste pickup, bulk item collection, educational services, Pay-As-You-Throw options, and roadside litter collection.

Increased waste diversion rates: Communities that contract with a single hauler or the regional WWRA are keeping much more waste out of landfills, through recycling and by composting their yard waste. Their average diversion rate is 34%. Meanwhile, the ten townships that do not participate in any regional system have an average diversion rate of only 5.6%.

Resiliency: Communities that contract with a single-hauler for their services can provide these services on a more consistent basis. For instance, recycling programs in York Township and Northfield Township were discontinued when revenue sharing from the County was insufficient to cover costs.

Washtenaw County residents are likely to favor a change to a single-hauler system: during the Regional Clean-up Days last spring a majority (62%) of the 333 participants surveyed said they would support having their local unit of government provide waste services to decrease costs and increase services, while only 20% of respondents said they would not.

If you would like more information on the Residential Solid Waste Profile and Assessment Report, a copy is available online at recycle.ewashtenaw.org, or please contact Marshall Labadie—Washtenaw County’s Environmental Programs Supervisor—at (734) 222-6889.

Submitted by,

Barbara Lucas, Program Assistant
Washtenaw County Planning and Environment
Solid Waste Program
Phone: 734-222-6874
Fax: 734-994-2459
E-mail: lucasb@ewashtenaw.org
Webpage: <http://recycle.ewashtenaw.org>