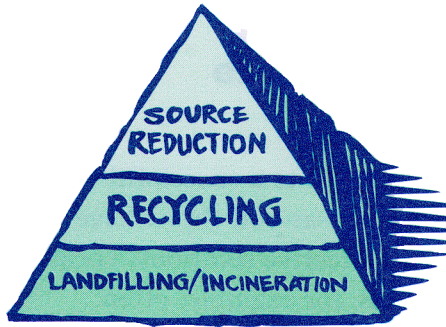




Pay-As-You-Throw

A Fact Sheet for State Officials



Like most state environmental officials and planners, you've probably been emphasizing the MSW management hierarchy: recommending that communities reduce and recycle as much as possible.

Today, waste reduction is the focus of MSW planning in most states. This has helped recycling programs to spread quickly, and recycling markets have been developed to purchase and process the collected materials.

Source reduction, however, has fallen behind this pace. While the rate of increase is slowing, individuals in this country are continuing to generate more waste each year-and, as a result, waste management is growing more difficult. Communities in your state need programs that will do more than increase recycling: they need to encourage residents to prevent waste, too.

For growing numbers of communities, "pay-as-you-throw" programs

are being used to achieve this goal. While fewer than 200 programs were in existence as recently as the mid-1980s, today nearly 2,000 communities across the country have adopted them.

What is pay-as-you-throw?

Pay-as-you-throw programs, also known as unit-based or variable-rate pricing, provide direct economic incentives for individuals to create less trash. Households are charged for waste collection based on the amount of waste they throw away-in the same way that they are charged for electricity, gas, and other utilities. As a result, residents are motivated not only to recycle more, but also to generate less waste in the first place.



Pay-as-you-throw programs can be structured in several different ways. Some communities charge residents based on the volume of waste they generate. Under volume-based programs, residents pay for each bag or can they fill up. Communities also can require that residents purchase tags or stickers and affix them to their own containers. Other communities bill residents based on the weight of their trash, although because of the cost of the equipment needed to weigh the waste and record the amount for billing purposes, weight-based programs are far less common.

What are the benefits of pay-as-you-throw?

However they are structured, all pay-as-you-throw programs share important benefits for both communities and their residents. First, households under pay-as-you-throw have more control over their solid waste management costs. While they may not realize it, residents pay for the waste management services they receive. And whether they pay through their taxes or with a flat fee, residents who generate less and recycle more are paying for neighbors who generate two or three times as much. With pay-as-you-throw, residents who reduce and recycle are rewarded with a lower trash bill.

This incentive has resulted in reported average reductions in waste amounts ranging from 25 to 35 percent. Recycling tends to increase significantly as well, further cutting down on the amount of waste requiring disposal. This can mean lower disposal costs, savings in waste transportation expenses, potentially greater revenues from the sale of recovered materials, and other savings.

Less waste and increased recycling at the local level translate into an improved solid waste management picture statewide. Larger amounts of recovered materials will become available to processors and remanufacturers, encouraging the development of recycling capacity and other infrastructure investments. The potential for lower costs can help increase the long-term economic stability of your communities' MSW

programs. And less waste means fewer natural resources will be depleted, less energy used, and less landfill space consumed, helping to preserve your state's environment. Because of these kinds of advantages, pay-as-you-throw has received bipartisan support at both the state and local levels. The use of pay-as-you-throw also has been endorsed by the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL).

Are there disadvantages to pay-as-you-throw?

While there are potential barriers to a successful program, communities with pay-as-you-throw have found effective solutions. Local officials, for example, often assume that illegal dumping will increase once residents are asked to pay for each container of waste they generate. Most communities with pay-as-you-throw have found this not to be the case, however, especially when they offer their residents recycling, composting for yard trimmings, and other programs that allow individuals to reduce waste legally. Others, particularly lower-income residents, worry about the amount they will have to pay. In many communities, however, coupon or voucher programs are helping to defray their expenses.



How can I learn more about pay-as-you-throw?

EPA has developed a series of products for anyone interested in pay-as-you-throw. Individuals looking for more information on these programs can request additional fact sheets, community success stories, and other materials. For local solid waste planners interested in bringing pay-as-you-throw to their community, EPA has developed a comprehensive set of tools to help them design and implement a successful program. To find out more about EPA's collection of products, call the Pay-as-you-throw Helpline toll free at 888-EPA-PAYT.