



# Pay-As-You-Throw

## A Cooling Effect on Climate Change

*The atmosphere that surrounds Earth contains many types of gases, including what are known as "greenhouse gases." These gases absorb and retain heat from the sun. Without greenhouse gases, the average temperature on Earth would be 5°F instead of the current 60°F. A buildup of these gases in the atmosphere, on the other hand, could raise global temperatures, triggering profound changes in the Earth's climate and ecosystems.*

*The manufacture and distribution of products and the subsequent management of solid waste can contribute to the formation of greenhouse gases. For this reason as well as for other environmental benefits, EPA is encouraging waste reduction efforts. The **Pay-As-You-Throw Outreach Initiative** is one EPA program helping to curb greenhouse gas emissions by expanding waste prevention and recycling in communities nationwide.*

### WHAT IS PAY-AS-YOU THROW?

**P**ay-as-you-throw programs break with tradition by ensuring that households see and feel the cost of waste disposal services. Under a traditional system, residents pay indirectly for these services through their property taxes or through a flat fee. With pay-as-you-throw, residents pay directly for trash services based on the amount of waste they throw away—similar to the way that they pay for electricity, gas, and other utilities.

When consumers pay for every bag or can of waste that they generate for disposal, they are motivated to recycle more and to look for creative ways to prevent waste in the first place. In communities that implement pay-as-you-throw programs, overall waste disposal can decline by 25 to 45 percent on average. In addition, recycling rates often increase in these communities, sometimes reaching double or even triple what they had been before the program was implemented.



Some residents in pay-as-you-throw communities change their behavior in other significant ways. While shopping, these individuals are more likely to purchase items in bulk and to select products with the least amount of unnecessary packaging. Rather than throw items away, a pay-as-you-throw household is likely to first look for ways to reuse these goods or to give them away. Rather than bag yard trimmings and leaves, households might choose instead to compost these materials in their backyards.

EPA is helping local governments and solid waste managers foster waste reduction in their communities by encouraging them to consider pay-as-you-throw programs. Through educational efforts, EPA is spreading the word about the many benefits of pay-as-you-throw programs. EPA also is providing tools and expert advice on how to plan and implement a successful pay-as-you-throw program and how to overcome potential barriers.



## HOW CAN PAY-AS-YOU-THROW HELP REDUCE GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS?

**T**he waste prevention and recycling efforts spawned by pay-as-you-throw programs can help curb greenhouse gas emissions in several significant ways:

■ **Diverting materials from disposal.** Keeping organic wastes (like food scraps, yard trimmings, and paper products) out of landfills reduces greenhouse gas emissions that are released when these materials decompose in a landfill. In addition, waste reduction diverts plastics and other synthetic materials from incinerators, reducing the greenhouse gas emissions that are created when these materials burn.

■ **Reducing the harvest of trees.** Any actions that reduce the need or demand for manufacturing new paper products help curb greenhouse gas emissions. When used paper is recycled into new paper products or when less paper is used, fewer trees have to be cut down. Trees take carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere and store it in wood.

■ **Conserving raw materials and the energy expended to retrieve, transport, and process them.** Making goods from recycled

materials typically requires less energy than using virgin materials. More efficient production and use of goods prevents waste and requires less energy. When energy demand decreases, fewer fossil fuels are burned and less carbon dioxide is emitted. Simply put, as more materials are recycled and waste prevented, less greenhouse gas is emitted into the atmosphere.

For more information

on Pay-As-You-Throw or more information on climate change and waste reduction, contact EPA's RCRA Hotline at 800-424-9346.



*Pay-as-you-throw gives individuals an incentive to consider ways to generate less trash and recycle more.*

## HOW DOES PAY-AS-YOU-THROW FIT INTO THE CLIMATE CHANGE ACTION PLAN?

**I**n October 1993, the Climate Change Action Plan was initiated to strengthen our country's commitment to reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The plan outlines more than 50 voluntary initiatives designed to reduce emissions of these gases to 1990 levels by the year 2000. EPA is responsible for encouraging attainment of about half of the reductions under this plan.

An old concept that is gaining fresh support, pay-as-you-throw is already playing a vital role in helping EPA achieve the goal outlined above. Close to 2,000 communities nationwide have already implemented pay-as-you-throw programs, and numerous additional programs are expected to start up each year as a result of EPA's education efforts. Pay-as-you-throw will to be a significant contributor to EPA's overall Climate Change Action Plan goal.

