

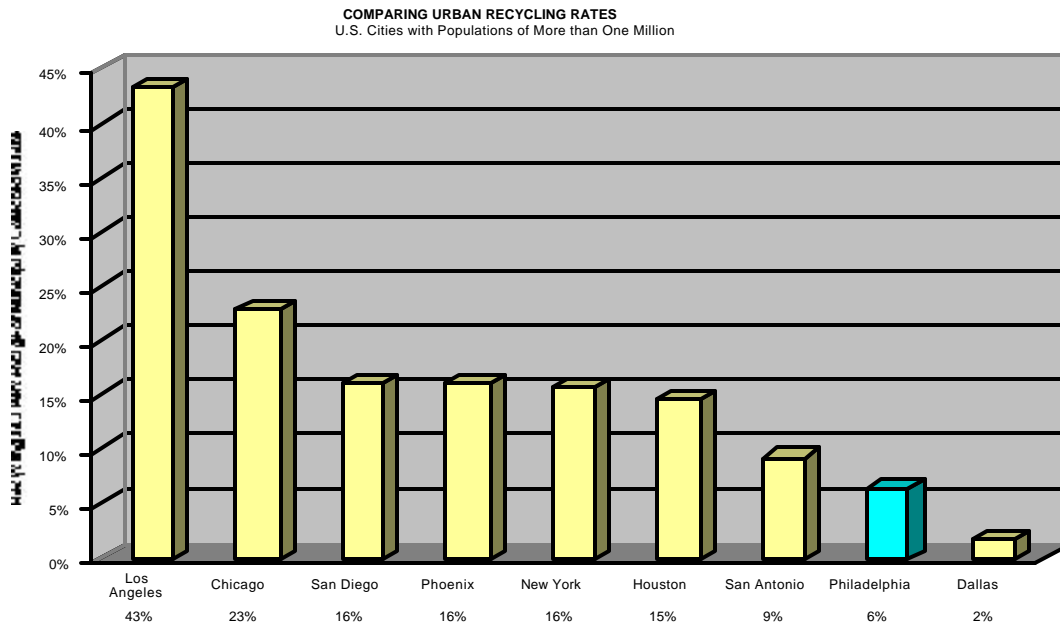
PHILADELPHIA RECYCLING PROGRAM AT THE CROSSROADS "A Citizen's Report on Recycling"

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

Philadelphia's recycling program, with a recovery rate of 6%, ranks eighth among the programs of nine cities in the United States with populations of more than one million. Philadelphia was the first of these cities to establish a recycling program, and after 17 years, its program has been the longest in operation. *Why has Philadelphia's well-staffed and well-funded recycling program achieved so little in comparison with others?* This report was prepared by the Recycling Alliance of Philadelphia to address this question. Specifically, it is intended for Mayor John Street, the Philadelphia City Council, the citizens of Philadelphia, and the members of the Recycling Alliance, which is working for a reaffirmation of the City's commitment to a 40% residential recycling rate, to be reached by 2010.

Figure E-1



SOURCE: Niche Waste Reduction & Recycling Systems, Inc., May 2000

Background

The early success of the Philadelphia Recycling Program (1987-1994) was a tribute to civic activism; it was achieved through a partnership among the Mayor, the City Council, and a responsive citizenry. Despite difficult financial times, Mayors W. Wilson Goode and Ed Rendell ensured that adequate resources and support for program development were forthcoming. The passage of a city ordinance, statewide mandatory recycling legislation and two executive orders provided a strong foundation for program development.

An independent Recycling Office and a talented recycling staff were organized under the auspices of the Mayor and Managing Director's Office. City and State laws called for the formation of the Recycling Advisory Committee (RAC) and Solid Waste Advisory Committee (SWAC), respectively, representing civic and environmental organizations, unions, citizens, businesses, and City agencies. Plans produced by these committees and adopted by the City Council set goals and schedules and described the resources needed to achieve the goal of recycling 40% of the combined commercial and municipal waste streams by 2000. This volume included a goal of recycling 47% of municipally collected waste.

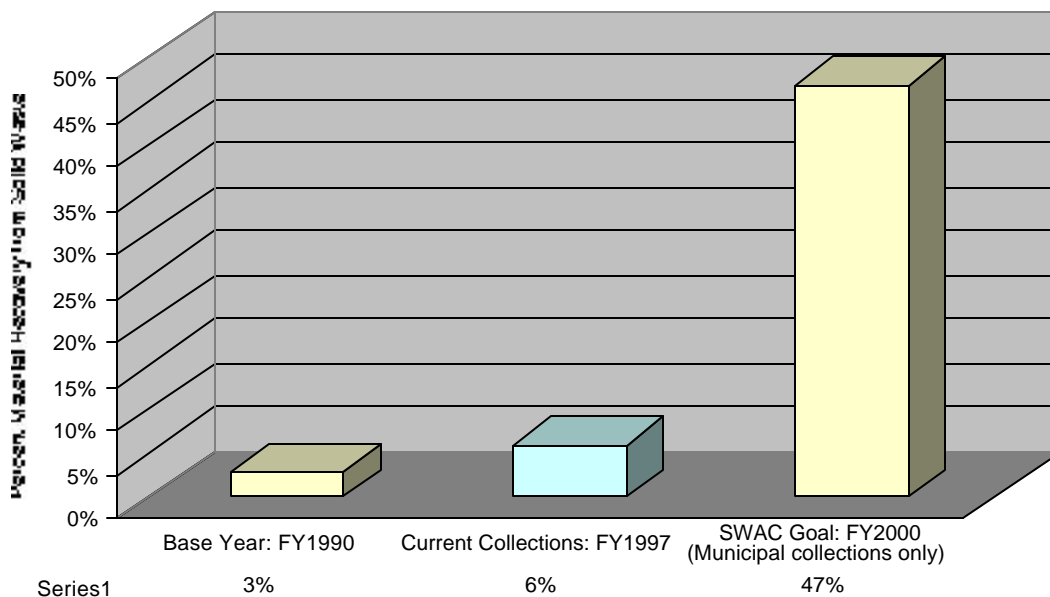
Citizen's Report on Recycling Executive Summary

Under the leadership of Recycling Coordinator Al Dezzi, a consensus-based decision-making process was developed. The work of the advisory committees, together with the staff of the Recycling Office and the Streets Department, Division of Sanitation, supported the expansion of residential recycling collection from a 23,000-resident pilot in 1989 to serve 525,000 residents in 1994, making Philadelphia's recycling program one of the largest in the nation. In addition, programs were developed to address leaf composting, commercial recycling, municipal building recycling, market development, and recycled content procurement policies.

After such notable beginnings, the recycling program began to falter. Despite objections, and contrary to the provisions of the Philadelphia City Code, the recycling program, and its authority for program planning, were assigned to the Streets Department and the Deputy Streets Director for Sanitation. In 1994 and 1995, respectively, the Streets Department failed to act on RAC resolutions and SWAC recommendations for strategic planning, or to commit to a schedule and operational resources to reach the 40% combined commercial/municipal recycling goal by the year 2000. Recycling program development stagnated. Recovery rates, which peaked just below 7% in 1995, dropped for three years in a row. In FY 1998, the Department lost a State grant of \$500,000 for recycling education and promotion. Over a 14-month period, two Recycling Coordinators resigned, together with 80% of the senior and program staff. According to the most recent figures (FY 1997); the City's recycling rate is 6.46%, almost 40% less than the goal projected in 1990.

Figure E-2

Philadelphia's Recycling Recovery from City Collected Solid Waste



SOURCE: Streets Dept, 1991 Philadelphia Solid Waste Management Plan

Why has Philadelphia's program performed so poorly?

Currently, Philadelphia's recycling program operates as an add-on service to waste disposal and makes an insignificant contribution to waste diversion. Ninety-four percent of City-collected waste is landfilled or incinerated. Given the lack of operational plans to increase recycling volumes, a continuing decline in recycling rates should be expected. The position of Recycling Coordinator has remained unfilled since

Citizen's Report on Recycling Executive Summary

February 2000, and has been vacant for 13 of the past 24 months. During that time the technical competence of the Recycling Unit has suffered, and consequently the in-house expertise for program development is lacking.

Philadelphia's low recycling rate is due to the Streets Department's unwillingness or inability to follow policy and provide the administrative and operational support to meet the well-defined objectives set for recycling in Philadelphia. In short, the leadership of the Streets Department since 1993 is directly responsible for the City's failure to meet recycling goals as established by the SWAC and approved by the City Council in the 1991 Solid Waste Management Plan. The Streets Department does not recognize the potential for recycling to achieve a significant reduction of the City's waste stream, and has been unwilling to consider strategies that would make the program more effective. The single act of removing recycling from the authority of the Streets Department, however, will not ensure the program's success. The City Charter mandates the operational role of the Department. A fundamental change in the attitude of the Streets Department, beginning with serious consideration of the potential of recycling, is essential for the development and maintenance of a successful recycling program.

Recommendations

Recycling in Philadelphia is at a crossroads. Despite setbacks, there is ample evidence that the program can succeed. Mayor John Street's appointment of a new Streets Commissioner is a good sign. William Johnson, an accomplished solid waste management professional, is reported to be a strong recycling proponent. Time will tell if his administration will meet the challenge with a recycling program that achieves high recovery rates.

The early success of the weekly curbside recycling pilot is also promising. Under the leadership of former Recycling Coordinator Joan Batory, weekly recycling collection on the same day as trash collection, coupled with an aggressive education and promotion program, has brought about a 39% increase in set-out volumes, and a decline in per ton collection costs. The experience of the pilot will set the tone for citywide expansion of weekly collection, and the foundation for higher collection rates.

Key to raising recycling rates and improving the cost-effectiveness of the recycling program are increases in collection efficiencies: increased tonnage, worker/collection improvements, and improved markets.

There is much to be learned from the experience of other large urban recycling programs. For example, Los Angeles, the nation's second largest city, has a municipal collection-recycling rate of 43% and rising. As a result of this success, that City has reduced its combined recycling and waste management costs by 25%. Serving 182,000 *more households* than Philadelphia, Los Angeles spends *\$2 million less* for the same services.

Among others outlined in the full report, the Alliance recommends the following steps to reinvigorate Philadelphia's recycling program:

- Reaffirm the city's commitment to a 40% recycling goal by 2010. This step, to be taken by the Mayor and City Council, includes re-establishing the authority of the Recycling Office, calling for the development of a strategic plan for reaching the 40% goal, and directing the full cooperation of all City agencies.
- Appoint a Recycling Coordinator with the authority to fill senior staff vacancies as needed and to direct the planning and implementation of the recycling program in cooperation with the Streets Department, Interagency Task Force, RAC, and SWAC.

**Citizen's Report on Recycling
Executive Summary**

- Plan and implement a schedule of citywide weekly curbside recycling collection as soon as possible. As part of that plan, consider the inclusion of textiles, old corrugated containers, and other materials.
- Investigate, plan, and implement curbside collection of yard waste from residences.
- Assign staff and resources to maximize technical assistance and enforcement for commercial and institutional recycling, including entertainment venues. This includes multifamily residences, office settings, health facilities, eating and drinking establishments, commercial business corridors, municipal facilities, public and private schools and colleges, libraries, sport stadiums, Fairmont Park facilities, outdoor festivals, concerts, and street and block parties
- Develop and conduct an ongoing educational and promotional program on recycling and waste reduction. All programs should have quantifiable results in terms of public awareness and increased recycling.
- Reestablish the recycling economic development program, including municipal procurement of recycled content products, private “buy recycled” initiatives, and support for recycling-related business development. Attention should be accorded to waste tire abatement, and businesses that manufacture tire-derived products should be supported. This effort in particular relates to the Mayor's campaign to remove neighborhood blight.

About the Recycling Alliance of Philadelphia

The Recycling Alliance of Philadelphia, according to its mission statement, is “a coalition of organizations and individuals working together to promote expanded recycling in the City of Philadelphia in order to improve the environment, economy and quality of life in our City.” This report is sponsored by the Alliance with the intent to inform the Streets Administration, the City Council, the citizens of Philadelphia, and members of the Recycling Alliance in renewing the City's commitment to a 40% residential recycling goal by 2010.

Recycling Alliance of Philadelphia Member Groups as of June 9, 2000:

| | |
|--|---|
| Center City Residents Association | Northern Liberties Neighborhood Association |
| Clean Air Council | Penn Environmental Group |
| Clean Water Action | The Pennsylvania Horticultural Society |
| Clean Water Fund | Philadelphians for Recycling |
| Community Land Trust Corporation | Queen Village Neighbors Association |
| E.Y.E. Openers | South Street Neighbors Association |
| Frankford United Neighbors | Southwest Community Development Corp |
| Fresh Fields | Spruce Hill Community Association |
| Friends of Pennypack Park | Village of Arts and Humanities |
| Greater Olney Community Council | Washington Square West Civic Association |
| Hunting Park Community Development Corporation | Weaver's Way |

RECYCLING ALLIANCE OF PHILADELPHIA – CONTACTS:

| | |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Kim Nicholas | Susan Gobreski |
| Clean Air Council | Clean Water Action |
| 135 S. 19th Street, Suite 300 | 1201 Chestnut Street, # 602 |

**Citizen's Report on Recycling
Executive Summary**

Philadelphia, PA 19103
Phone: 215-567-4004 ext. 237
Fax (215)567-5791
knichola@cleanair.org

Philadelphia, PA 19107
Phone: (215) 640-8800
Fax:(215) 640-0930
sgobreski@cleanwater.org