

Case Study on Arvada Solid Waste Collection System – Arvada, CO

Despite having a population of 108,000 Arvada government has historically had minimal involvement in solid waste (the city provides diversion of some organics and generally supporting diversion and special waste programs operated by private companies in the region).

In 2010, however, Arvada utilized Energy Efficiency Conservation Block Grant funding to undertake an evaluation of the residential solid waste collection practices in the city. At the time, refuse collection was conducted by about 10 private haulers in an open subscription system – most of these haulers offered some level of recycling for additional fees (the city-wide recycling rate was estimated to be about 10%). The Arvada leadership was interested in evaluating how the existing system stacked up against collection alternatives in terms of expanded recycling, collection efficiencies, environmental impacts and job creation/loss. The study included:

- A hauler survey to evaluate current services offered by each private hauler and associated costs
- A benchmarking study of several US communities with each of the options evaluated for Arvada to identify pros and cons for each option
- A cost analysis for implementing each option
- An estimate of relative greenhouse gas emissions, impacts to Arvada's roads and job creation/loss

Based on a comparison of the status quo open hauler system against options ranging from implementing hauler licensing requirements, contracting for collection services with multiple haulers, and an exclusive (single hauler) contract. The results of this work concluded that as the number of haulers decreased:

- The recycling rate would increase (to about 27%)
- The cost to residents would decrease (from an existing high of \$19/month to \$11/month)
- Collection-related jobs would decrease from 43 to 19 full-time equivalents
- Annual greenhouse gas emissions would decrease from 986 to 660 MTCO₂E

The public process coordinated by Arvada staff during the course of the study included a survey of 2,000 households, one-on-one and group meetings with haulers during the data-gathering phases of the study, formation of a citizen task force to provide early input, city council and other stakeholder meetings once the study was completed. While the city's process was not extravagant in terms of public input, the process was effectively stymied by an organized group of individuals from other communities, local haulers and Arvada residents who opposed the study and any changes in existing solid waste collection practices. In general, these opponents felt that Arvada's government should not be involved in collection, that existing recycling efforts were adequate and that an open system provided residents with the best services at the lowest costs. While these opinions had merit, their means of delivery were problematic – a small number of opponents expressed a disproportionate amount of input and they utilized an unfortunate combination of inaccurate information, scare tactics (targeted to those with fixed incomes), and threats to city council members.

As a result of the public opposition associated with the Arvada solid waste collection study, Arvada's city council has determined that any substantial change to its existing system is not politically feasible and has eliminated the options of contracting for services. During 2011, city council is still considering a requirement for hauler licensing but it is not expected that this will include the financial incentives for recycling (such as PAYT) that staff had hoped would be included in any collection option to significantly increase city-wide diversion levels.

Contact:

Jessica Schluederberg

Arvada Sustainability Coordinator

720-898-7511

jschluederberg@arvada.org