

Spartanburg embraces revamped recycling program

Participation, volume double with use of big blue carts

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City residents have gone green — or blue — as recycling participation and volume doubled from 2009 to 2010.

The city revamped its recycling program in January 2010 when large blue rollout carts took the place of smaller bins and new automated recycling replaced manual, more labor-intensive curbside sorting.

The changes have paid dividends as participation in the recycling program increased from 2,000 households in 2009 to 5,600 households in 2010, said Solid Waste Manager Bill Thompson. More than half of all city residents now participate in the recycling program.

Assistant City Manager Chris Story said the department changes, mostly attributed to salary savings from downsizing the department, saved taxpayers about \$300,000 in the one-year period.

The city collected about 526 tons of recyclables in 2009 and saw a dramatic increase last year when 1,109 tons was collected. Story said the incremental increase saved about \$20,000 worth



ALEX C. HICKS JR./Alex.Hicks@shj.com
 Timothy Atkins goes about his recycling duties for the city of Spartanburg. The number of recycling participants increased from 2,000 in 2009 to 5,600 in 2010. The city collected 526 tons of recyclables in 2009 and 1,109 tons in 2010.

of landfill space last year. Thompson said he's been amazed by the success of the program after the changes were implemented.

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"I had no idea it would be this successful," Thompson said. "I was looking for an extra 1,000 — or roughly one-third of the participation — and I thought 2,000 or 3,000 more participants would be great, but it reflects what can be done when a team pulls together."

Thompson said city staff promoted the recycling program changes at neighborhood meetings and distributed pamphlets on the benefits of recycling.

"Everyone who's been involved, from council to (City Manager) Ed Memmott, has been so supportive of the move," he said.

The city has been able to downsize its public works department from 56 employees to 39 workers through attrition.

Thompson said the service is streamlined and instead of collecting recyclables four days weekly, recyclables are now collected twice each month. Employees previously sorted and collected recyclables at the curb, but garbage trucks are now used to dump recyclables from the larger rollout carts where they are sorted automatically.

"Our workman's compensation has dropped significantly because this is a much safer way to handle our recyclables," Thompson said.

Councilwoman Cate Ryba said she's excited about the increased participation and volume and credited Thompson and his team with researching how other communities handle recyclables.

"Bill and his team definitely did their due diligence and I think it's indicative of how people are more conscious of how they treat their community and the earth and how groups like Upstate Forever that promote sustainability issues have an effect on our community," Ryba said.

Currently, the city collects paper, numbers one and two plastic bottles and aluminum cans. They don't collect glass, although Thompson said he is looking into ways to expand the items the city can collect. Spartanburg County has two recycling dropoff points in the city, one on Fernwood-Glendale Road and another on Alba Court, where glass is accepted.

“We want to build on the successes and expand what can be recycled,” Story said. “What we've been able to accomplish is terrific, but we can do better and we're looking to do more.”

Story said an announcement on expanding the recycling program would be forthcoming.

City residents may obtain a recycling roll cart by calling (864) 596-3690.