

Update on the Charlotte County recycling program

By Lorenzo Daetz, Senior Program Coordinator, Solid Waste Division

The Charlotte County solid waste division began an enhanced recycling program for Charlotte County in March 2010. The initial change was to adopt the single stream recycling process. This process eliminated the need for residents to separate recyclables into the different bins—all recyclables can be commingled in one bin. Additionally, plastics that were deemed recyclable were expanded to include those labeled 3 through 7. An ambitious campaign to educate the public of the changes was simultaneously conducted.

Several factors drove the change in our community, first and foremost was doing the right thing for the environment by recycling as many materials as possible and reducing the impact on our natural resources. Charlotte County's franchise hauler, Waste Management, was offering single stream processing to the communities it serves. Statistics demonstrated that the single stream recycling process increased participation as well as volume; this diverts materials from the landfill and subsequently extends its life. Extending the longevity of the landfill is a significant cost-saving measure, because building or expanding landfills is a very costly proposition. It is also difficult to find a location for a new one that the community is willing to accept—no one wants a landfill in their neighborhood.

In 2013 the county reviewed its options to either extend the built in 5-year contract extension with its franchise hauler or put the contract out for bid. As a result recycling got another boost without increasing the costs to the residents. Waste Management offered to purchase 84,000 yellow top recycling carts to replace the small recycle bins as part of the 5-year contract extension agreement.

Prior to ordering the new recycling carts, Charlotte County took on a proactive approach to the implementation. The cart size took into account our goal of increasing participation and volume as well as the input received from our residents. The solid waste division reached out and attended home owners associations meetings and listened to their concerns as well as those of the managers of these communities. Including their input contributed significantly to the overall success and participation in recycling. The distribution was done during the month of November 2013 as most seasonal residents are here and it is not in the heart of the hurricane season. It took approximately 4 weeks for the 84,000 carts to be delivered throughout the county.

We have measured the success of the recycling program by the participation rate study conducted in May 2014, which came in at 77 percent of the possible households participating in the program. We will do the count again this November as we expect that in-season the rate will be even higher. Additionally, the community has increased the recycling tonnage by 19 percent since December 2013 with the cart program. This collaborative effort of our residents, the Charlotte County solid waste division and Waste Management will help us exceed the state-mandated 50 percent recycling goals by December 2014.