



COMMUNITY RECYCLING

Communicating the What? How? Where? and When?

Tips and perspectives from the
American Forest & Paper Association





From old to new:

Recovered paper accounted for more than 36 percent of the raw material used to make new paper products in the U.S. in 2008:

- Used newspapers are usually made into new newsprint, egg cartons, or paperboard.
- Used corrugated (cardboard) boxes are recycled into new boxes or paperboard.
- High-grade white office paper can be recycled into almost any new paper product, including tissue.

Congratulations!

The collective efforts of millions of Americans have helped take paper recycling to unprecedented heights. But there's more to be done; the American Forest & Paper Association (AF&PA) has prepared this guide to help you communicate more effectively in launching or refining a community recycling program.

Tell 'em how it's done!

Effective communications are key to the ultimate success of your collection program. Specifically, you must answer these important questions for residents:

- What items/materials will be collected?
- How should those items be prepared for collection?
- Where will collection take place?
- When will you be collecting recyclables?

In this guide, we'll give you some tips on how to maximize your communications efforts and share some examples of creative tactics employed by recent AF&PA Recycling Award winners and finalists.

Before you launch a new or revised collection program...

Whether you're starting from scratch or making changes to an existing collection program, here are a few things that will help you kick things off on the right foot.

Find out what residents know and don't know about recycling.

Conduct a brief survey. This will help you determine the scope of your communications challenge and identify any common misperceptions in your community. Be sure to include demographic information that will allow you to sort data by neighborhood, dwelling type, and/or other key variables. You can then target your communications accordingly.

Communications count!

Be sure to include funds for outreach and education when budgeting for your recycling program.

Engage your market. Your market can help you pinpoint exactly how residents should prepare recyclables for collection. Bear in mind that the simpler the requirements of your recycling program, the more likely residents will be to participate. Encourage your market to be as flexible as possible in their requirements. Also look for ways your recycling staff can help ease the burden on residents.

Start big! Hold a high-profile kickoff event that will generate maximum media attention. At the same time, provide each household with literature clearly outlining the parameters of your program. The better they understand at the outset, the less you'll have to correct in the future.

Target communications: Consider special outreach to individual populations within your community, such as senior citizens and residents for whom English is a second language. You may also need to tailor information for residents of single versus multi-family dwellings.

What's a market?

For the purposes of this guide, your "market" is whoever takes contractual ownership of the recyclables collected in your community. It may be a waste hauler, a materials recovery facility (MRF), or a recycling company, depending on the specifics of your program.

SPOTLIGHT:

Orange County, NC

2009 AF&PA Recycling Award winner

To maintain and expand its recycling activities, Orange County (pop. 128,000) assesses an annual "3-R" (waste reduction, reuse, and recycling) fee — billed with property taxes — on every habitable building. The county reports that recent efforts specifically targeting multi-family dwellings — including brochures in Spanish, Korean, Mandarin, and Japanese — contributed directly to an increase in the annual volume of recyclables collected.



SPOTLIGHT:

Athens-Clarke County, GA

2009 AF&PA Recycling Award finalist

Athens-Clarke County (pop. 105,000) puts an emphasis on program visibility, using advertisements in movie theaters and decorated trucks that act as rolling billboards. Special events also help to keep community residents energized: An annual “Clean Your Files Day” has collected more than 160 tons of paper over the past eight years. A separate annual “Shred Event,” launched in 2006, has recovered 13 tons of shredded paper.



Streamline your brochures, signage, and websites

Use clear, active language. As you work to educate and motivate your residents, try to build a bond to let them know that you’re in it together. You also want to keep it simple. For example, “Residents are requested to place in their bins only those items listed below” would be better said “We’re recycling the following items.”

Use visual examples. Show residents what you want and don’t want to see in the collection bin. Clearly divide lists into “Yes” and “No” columns. Consult with your market to compile your “No” list. Common contaminants include:

- Food waste
- Glass, wood, and metals (including foil)
- Tapes, glues, and pressure-sensitive labels
- Plastic films and other plastic materials
- Medical or hazardous materials
- Cloth or fabric
- Used tissues, napkins, or paper towels

Is it working?

Solicit feedback from your market to make sure your residents are collecting the right materials the right way.

Repeat. Repeat. Repeat.

Recycling education is an ongoing process and your messages will need regular reinforcement.

Correct common recycling mistakes. As your program goes on, you'll be able to identify any problems your residents are having in participating correctly. These can be highlighted on pre-printed "oops" tags, which collection crews leave behind to identify undesired or incorrectly prepared recyclables. Use clear, friendly language to explain the mistake and encourage residents to get more information via your program website or recycling help line.

It's all in the timing.

Regular recyclables collection schedules — closely tied to general waste collection schedules — yield the best results.

Create opportunities for free publicity. Announce recycling statistics (recovery and/or participation rates) and/or hold recycling-themed contests and events. Another way to generate media interest in your recycling efforts is to submit an entry for an annual AF&PA Recycling Award, which recognizes outstanding recycling programs nationwide. For contest rules, entry information, and case studies from previous finalists, visit paperrecycles.org.

Consider paid placements. Additional means of getting your recycling message out there include:

- Local media advertising including TV, radio, newspapers, magazines, and billboards
- Advertisements on popular local websites
- Utility bill inserts or direct mail
- Booths or displays at public events
- Door hangers or other direct-to-resident materials
- Contests and other incentive programs

Look for partnership opportunities. Recycling enjoys broad public support and therefore generates favorable publicity for local businesses and institutions. Your involvement will help ensure that the right messages about the what/how/where/when of your program are getting out.

SPOTLIGHT:

Brevard County, FL

2008 AF&PA Recycling Award winner

Brevard County (pop. 543,000) uses partnerships to leverage its recycling investment, including an annual School Phone Book Recycling Contest sponsored by the major publishers of county phone books. In 2007, participating schools collected more than 50,000 phone books totaling more than 250 tons. The winning schools shared prizes totaling \$6,000.



Keep up the good work!

Active, ongoing communications with your residents are essential to helping your recycling program reach its full potential. To supplement your efforts, visit paperrecycles.org for the latest case studies from the annual AF&PA Recycling Awards, plus useful information on paper recycling — including interactives, videos, and up-to-date statistics, all at your fingertips.



American Forest & Paper Association

1111 Nineteenth Street, NW
Suite 800
Washington, DC 20036
afandpa.org

paperrecycles.org



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