Tackling Contamination in Recycling

Methods of working together to reduce contamination:

• Curbside
• Transfer Station
• Multifamily Housing
About WWP

• Willimantic Waste Paper Co., Inc. is a multi-faceted waste recycling enterprise.

• Operating 6 waste processing facilities

• Flagship material recovery facility uses a state-of-the-art recyclable sorting system handling over 400 tons per day.

• 2007 we switched 4 facilities from dual stream processing to one large single stream sorting system
Dual Stream vs. Single Stream

- Dual stream recycling always had contamination
- The same problems that we are having today, we had with dual stream
- Plastic bags and broken mixed glass have always been major components of contamination
- Dual stream fiber contamination was roughly 2%
- Dual stream bottles and cans contamination was roughly 10%
- Single Stream Recyclables contamination hovers between 15 to 25%
Partnerships & Standardizing the Message

• Worked with CT DEEP, Recycle CT and other recovery facilities
• Generate a universal list of acceptable items
• Also worked with two regions that serve our facility, Southeastern Regional Resource Recovery Authority and Mid Northeast Recycling Committee
• Worked along side public works departments to help them understand the issues with contamination
• Recycle CT developed a search box that people can type in an item and it tells if it’s recyclable and why or why not
• This is a very useful tool to point people in the right direction
Changing Perceptions About Recycling

- Single Stream is an industry term
- Mixed recyclables portrays a clearer message to general public
- A lot of items are recyclable - just not on the curbside
Our Views and Simple Correction Action

- We feel it is more important to show what is not acceptable
- Keep the message simple of what’s acceptable
- What’s in, What’s out is useful reference for universal list of acceptable recyclables
- Trash and plastic bags go hand in hand
- Getting the word out that plastic bags are recyclable, just not in curbside

- Adding stickers onto bins, carts, and dumpsters
- Updating websites and utilizing flyers
- Posting warning tags onto carts
Our Response to Contamination

• Trying to use clear examples of what plastics are acceptable
• The numbers on plastics create confusion, people end up throwing into recycling due to just having a number
• Revamped our messages to our customers to make them aware of these issues
• Pictures are helpful
• Working on creating a sticker that is standardized and universal
How We Handle the Load Inspection Process

- Photograph every load that comes in
- The photographer rates and inspects the load
- Immediately transferred to recycling inspector to analyze and give appropriate contamination rating
- Extremely effective process IF communities cooperate
- Must be receptive to new ideas
Working with Towns, the Residential Response

- Tolland is a prime example for proactive response
- We service 5200 households residentially
- Started sending notifications
- Also sent the routes for the days serviced by using GPS in our vehicles
Tolland Dirty Load
Tolland Results

- Several months later contamination rate has decreased significantly
- Still continue to monitor loads
- Tolland sent email blasts, put a message they received from us on their website
- Informed the residents on appropriate recyclables
- Overall Tolland is a perfect example of how information and being proactive is beneficial
Tolland After Inspection

- As you can see the number of bags has significantly decreased.
Transfer Stations

- The same type of messages were sent to operators of transfer stations
- They previously lacked basic signs on where materials should be dropped off
- Operators of the transfer station didn't monitor the materials thoroughly
- Average contamination rate for transfer stations was around 20%
Transfer station bad loads
Transfer Station Results

- WWP worked with transfer stations to make better signs in front of containers
- Discussed with operators on items to look for that aren't recyclable
- Also a trash barrel is next to recycling bins for items that are not recyclable
- On the door there is a sheet that says what is and what is not acceptable to recycle there to reduce confusion
- After several months, their contamination rate is significantly down
- Still continue to monitor
Visible Difference
Working with Multifamily Housing

• We provide services and processing for Mansfield's numerous multifamily apartment complexes
• Previously the recycling container was the same size and color as the trash container, only difference was the label
• Mansfield worked very much with us to find solutions
Sample Loads for Multifamily
Multifamily Results

- Different color containers, with yellow lids, and a large sticker identifying acceptable recyclables
- Mansfield also does their own inspections and notifies us what containers not to service if it's too contaminated
- Most importantly the apartment complex is notified that their container is not serviceable
Importance of Knowledge

- One of the largest contributors to improve recycling is making sure the residents know what to put into the correct containers.
- What’s in what’s out is very beneficial.
- Tolland showing what is unacceptable on their website, and sending emails informs residents exactly what cannot go in.
- Getting a clear message to the general public through education, advertising, and flyers should all be apart of the campaign.
Cooperation

• When towns and haulers are working together to resolve the issue the results are outstanding

• Mansfield is a great example of working with the generator to improve their recycling quality

• Working to have a universal list of acceptable and unacceptable items has been a large contributing factor to the success of our program
Thank you for your time