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After First Year, Lafayette's Curbside Compost Program a Success

City officials say households sent 21 percent less waste to the landfill since the program began last February, saving money and protecting the environment

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(LAFAYETTE, COLORADO) — Lafayette households are sending significantly less trash to the landfill thanks to a new residential curbside composting program, which is celebrating one year in operation. Lafayette is the third city in Colorado, along with Boulder and Louisville, to require curbside composting service for residents and one of about 200 communities nationwide that have some type of residential composting program.

Since compost carts first appeared in neighborhoods within the city's service area in February 2015, the amount of household waste going to the landfill has dropped 21 percent from 149 pounds per household per year to 117 pounds, a decrease the city attributes to increased composting. Nearly 40 percent of Lafayette's residential waste is made up of compostable organic materials, including food scraps, yard waste, dirty paper towels and tissues.

"These are very encouraging numbers," said Lafayette Mayor Christine Berg. "When people realize they can get a smaller, cheaper trash cart if they compost, they get on board," she added. "Not only is composting a net positive for the environment, there is increased awareness around food waste in each household."

Mayor Berg, along with the local citizens group "Lafayette Composts," led the effort to start the curbside composting program. City Council unanimously approved it in 2014 as part of a new contract with Republic Services, which also hauls residents' recyclables and trash.

"Composting gives us a chance to be part of something huge in the waste-free movement," said Lafayette resident Orel Zwiebel. "It's an educational game for my two children: Is this garbage or compost? Is this recycling or compost? Knowing that we can compost majority of our waste became more fun and practical," Zwiebel added. "I also love the option of putting leaves and other yard debris straight into my compost bin. No bags; less waste."

More than 200 Lafayette households requested smaller trash carts within the program's first month—a trend



that has continued. Over the past year, the number of 32-gallon carts in use, the smallest size available, climbed 37 percent while the number of large, 64-gallon and 96-gallon carts in use dropped 12 percent, according to the city's data.

Lafayette residents who downsize their trash carts can save between \$8.25 and \$16.50 on their monthly trash bills. About 35 percent of households in the city's service area have signed up for smaller trash carts since the composting service began. The city has also received requests for curbside composting service from several homeowners associations (HOAs). Curbside composting service is mandatory for single-family homes in the city's service area but not for HOAs.

Most people know that recycling and composting have big environmental benefits. Recycling conserves natural resources and saves energy. It also reduces emissions of greenhouse gases that are driving climate change.

Composting creates healthier soils and helps soils store water. Keeping organics out of the landfill also helps reduce pollution that fuels climate change. When organics decompose in airtight landfills, methane, a greenhouse gas with 84 times the heat-trapping power of carbon dioxide in the short-term, is generated. According to the EPA, landfills are the nation's third largest source of methane pollution.

Last year, Lafayette residents recycled and composted enough material to prevent 4,600 metric tons of greenhouse gases from going into the atmosphere. That's roughly the equivalent of keeping nearly 1,000 cars off the road for a year.

Education is key to success

One of the keys to a successful program is public outreach. It's especially important to work with residents who stand to benefit the most, but because of language or other barriers, they can be hard to reach. For that reason, the city contracted with Eco-Cycle, the nation's largest nonprofit recycler, to knock on doors in seven low-income, mainly Latino neighborhoods to explain the benefits of curbside composting and downsizing trash carts.

"The idea was to give people a choice and a way to lower their trash bills, all while helping to protect the environment," said Randy Moorman, Eco-Cycle's Community Campaigns Director. "We knew from experience working in other local communities that going door-to-door to explain the benefits to residents and answer their questions can be really helpful."

The results achieved by the bilingual canvassers were impressive. Between March and July of last year, the number of residents who reported using their new compost carts increased more than 200 percent—from 23 percent to 75 percent. In a follow-up survey, many of these residents confirmed that they valued and were using the curbside collection system.

"Lafayette has been a recycling leader for years," Mayor Berg said pointing to the city's curbside recycling and Pay-as-You-Throw fee system, launched in 2007, and its partnership with Eco-Cycle, which is helping the city reduce waste at public events, such as the annual Peach Festival. "Adding curbside composting is going to move us closer to achieving our Zero waste goals."

For more information, visit: <http://www.cityoflafayette.com/index.aspx?NID=219> and www.ecocycle.org/compost