

City of Nacogdoches Recycling

Recycling Recession

The things we throw away aren't finding many buyers right now.

Recycling programs may be local in nature, but they are tied intrinsically to the global economy. That's never been clearer than in past months. Last fall, recyclable commodities prices suffered their worst crash in history, falling from record high prices to record lows. Markets for metals, paper and plastic simply froze, leaving municipalities and their haulers to stock pile mountains of recyclables. The situation with paper was especially effected. The United States had been exporting 20% of its recycled paper to China, where it was made into boxes for packaging shoes, electronics and other goods to be shipped right back. When consumer demand fell off a cliff in October, it dragged the economics of paper recycling down.

Things are a little better now; commodity prices have bounced back, if only a little. Markets for recyclables are moving again. But municipalities are in for a year or more of tough choices about the most visible initiative they undertake in the name of protecting the environment. When prices were at their peek, a large number of cities and counties made money on recycling. Now, at a time when budgets are already tight, many will have to pay someone to take all of those bottles, cans and newspapers off their hands.

Unless commodity prices rise quickly, some localities may be forced to increase fees homeowners pay for recycling. Others may look at reducing hours at recycling centers or decreasing the frequency of curbside pick-ups.

What no one seems to be talking about is giving up recycling entirely. Recycling's resilience is a sign of the growing green consciousness in many cities and counties across the country. It has taken decades to get people used to the idea of placing plastic and paper in separate containers, and they don't want to go back. Once you turn a program off it's really hard to turn it back on.

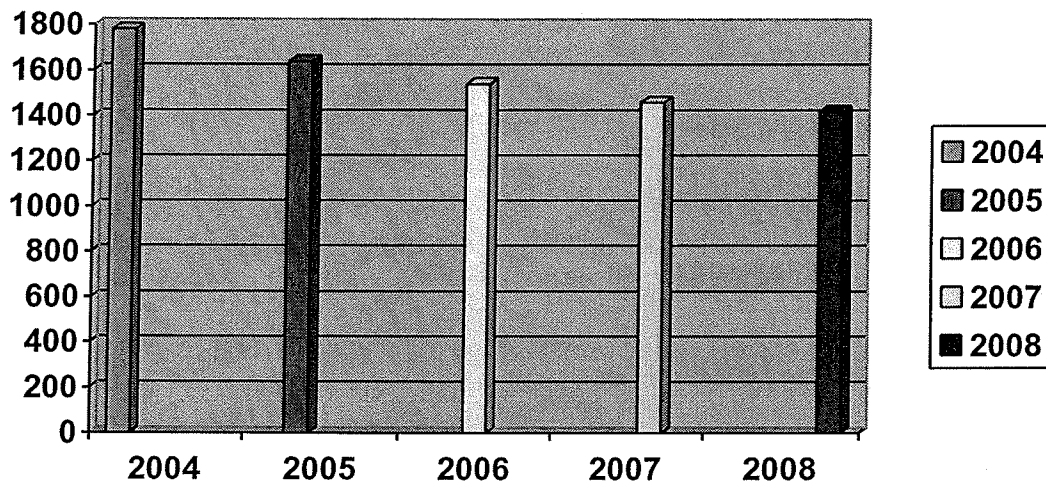
The City of Nacogdoches curbside recycling program was initiated about fifteen years ago. **Grants** played a role in establishing the current curbside recycling program. Grants have since diminished, and the cost of maintaining the recycling program has continued to rise. Recyclables collected by the City of Nacogdoches are transported to the City of Lufkin for processing and shipment. The City of Nacogdoches does not receive compensation for recyclables from Lufkin. The 2008 cost of the recycling program was **\$183.24** per cubic yard. It currently cost **\$5.89** per cubic yard to landfill refuse.

The cost of recycling is not the only consideration in evaluating alternatives. The City of **Lufkin** notified the City of Nacogdoches they would no longer accept recyclables from Nacogdoches after July 1, 2009. Later, Lufkin agreed to continue to take cardboard and paper only. What Lufkin might do in the future, will most likely be driven by recyclable markets.

The City currently spends approximately **\$260,000** per year to operate curbside recycling. \$142,807 for labor; \$60,000 for equipment and \$57,390 for recycling bags and funding to Keep Nacogdoches Beautiful, which is tasked with promotion of the recycling program. If the curbside recycling program were discontinued three employee slots may be eliminated, most likely through attrition. Two rear-load recycling trucks may be sold, for approximately \$100,000.

Curbside recycling has seen limited success and declining participation in recent years. In 2004 the curbside residential recycling program generated 1,780 cubic yards versus 1,420 cubic yards in 2008. It is estimated 20% (1,400) of the households participate in curbside recycling.

Cubic Yards Recycled per Year



One key to a successful recycling program is convenience for the recycler. Curbside collection helps makes recycling extremely convenient but is not very green. The sanitation truck collecting recyclables traverses the City once per week picking up a limited number of blue bags. Another key component is education. The City contracts with Keep Nacogdoches Beautiful for the education component. A complimentary green initiative to recycling is **source reduction**. The City, with the assistance of KNB and the County Extension Service, can

initiate a source reduction program that will reduce the amount of landfilled materials.

Other issues with the recycling program include the cost of blue bags. The City currently distributes "blue bags" at no direct charge to citizens interested in participating in the curbside recycling program. The cost of the "**blue bags**" is **\$38,000** per year. **Only one-third of those bags are returned with recyclables.**

If the City were to discontinue curbside recycling and offer drop-site recycling, whereby interested recyclers take recyclables to the landfill, depending upon volume of recyclables, increase efficiency and be considerably more green than the current program.

The City currently operates a recycling drop-site at the sanitary landfill. If the curbside recycling were suspended, the landfill recycling drop-site will easily accommodate accepting recyclables with reasonable cost. The disadvantage of this alternative is lack of convenience for those who wish to recycle. If the City wishes to increase the volume of recyclables under this method, there must be a sustained marketing/education campaign. Assuming no revenues for recyclables and transport to Lufkin the cost would be \$5,027 per year. Assuming 960 yards of recyclables the cost per yard to recycle would be **\$5.24**, which is 'green' compared to the \$183.00 per cubic yard for the curbside recycling program.

If the City desired to develop **satellite recycling drop sites**, there would be a one-time cost for containers and security equipment. Satellite drop sites should be staffed at least eight hours per day and closed when not staffed. If drop sites are not staffed, it is highly probable recyclables will be contaminated, limiting the value of the satellite drop program. Satellite drop sites will enhance convenience, but at greater cost than utilizing a centralized drop point at the sanitary landfill.

The City identified another source for recyclables in **Tyler**. But, it would cost Nacogdoches citizens an additional **\$68,000** per year. There will be others interested in Nacogdoches recyclables, but for a cost.

The City currently provides citizens the opportunity to donate **\$1.00** per month via an additional water/sewer/solid waste payment. From the 12,255 accounts the City services the voluntary donation generates about \$500 per month, which is remitted to Keep Nacogdoches Beautiful. In addition to the **\$6,000** per year voluntary payment, the City pays **KNB** an additional **\$24,000** per year to assist in funding beautification and green initiatives.

One practical short-term solution to the recycling dilemma is to **suspend curbside recycling** the end of June and begin a promotional/educational effort to promote use of the sanitary landfill **recyclable drop site**. In addition there should be a promotional/educational effort to promote source reduction. Any

monies saved from modifying recycling, will be held in reserve for green initiatives.

Long-term solution(s) will be developed over coming months. **Citizen collaboration** is essential to finding a long-term solution(s), for in the end it is the citizens of Nacogdoches who will finance green initiatives and share green initiative benefits. The goal is to have an **effective efficient green initiative** the citizens of Nacogdoches can be proud of.

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City of Nacogdoches
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