

ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES

Q: Aren't there other things we can do to increase recycling and reduce waste?

A: Of course. That is why Lexington's PAYT program is part of a package of improvements to the Town's waste management program, and not a single independent measure. The Town and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts have a number of other recycling initiatives underway, and they complement PAYT. But none have the potential of PAYT to reduce waste and save money at the same time. Most other efforts - such as recycling education - are more effective after PAYT is implemented.

Q: Can't we increase our recycling rate through public education, advertising, prize contests, etc.?

A: Data from other towns indicates that public education does not, by itself, result in major changes in recycling behavior unless it is accompanied by real changes in the substance of the solid waste program. For example, one study found no correlation between public education expenditures and recycling rates. Lexington has had a first rate public education program for the past few years, and now needs to make some real program changes in order to make progress. Public education is still important to ensuring a smooth implementation and realizing full benefits from any change.

Q: Would strict enforcement of a mandatory recycling bylaw make it unnecessary to consider PAYT?

A: Enforcement of mandatory recycling might increase recycling rates, but it would not achieve the very important benefits of reducing the volume of non-recyclable trash. Furthermore, experience in other Towns has shown that strict enforcement is difficult to achieve and can create ill-will toward the recycling program. Some increased enforcement to deal with flagrant violations is worthwhile, but enforcement is not a substitute for PAYT.

Q: Why not put 100% of the waste management costs on the tag?

A: The Massachusetts DEP recommends against this because when fixed costs (such as collection contracts) are funded by a fluctuating revenue stream (tag sales), the program may become fiscally unstable. Experience shows that the benefits of PAYT can be realized without putting all costs onto the tag.

Q: Why not give everyone 52 tax-levy tags or 1 free barrel per week?

A: PAYT programs have been successful with these parameters, so it would not be unreasonable. However, low volume generators are penalized by giving out more tags than they really need (since the high volume generators use the extra tags to shift expenses to the tax levy where costs are shared with low volume generators). And giving out too many free tags reduces the motivation for reducing waste. In the year 2000, 87% of PAYT towns in Massachusetts distributed no tax levy tags and 9% distributed 52. The Lexington proposal is to distribute 26 - a compromise number.

Q: Wouldn't weekly collection of recycling increase recycling rates?

A: Yes. Studies indicate that weekly pick-up might increase our municipal recycling rate by about 5%. However, it appears that weekly collection would increase collection costs by approximately \$196,000 per year. Because this imposes an additional expense upon a budget that is already under pressure by the payments under the NESWC contract, weekly collection is not currently part of the proposed PAYT package. The Town might wish to consider it in the future.

Q: If we want to encourage recycling without increasing collection costs, why don't we collect recycling weekly and collect trash bi-weekly?

A: Trash contains food waste, so some households would find it undesirable to keep it around for two weeks. Any decision to keep trash longer than a week should be an individual choice, not one dictated by the program design.