

## **Community Recycling Case Study: Athens-Clarke County**

**Community:** Athens-Clarke County, Georgia

**Number of residents:** 105,000

**Amount of paper collected by county for recycling in 2008:** 10,066 tons

**Grades collected:** old corrugated (cardboard) containers (OCC), old newspapers (ONP), and mixed paper (direct mail, paperboard boxes, magazines, catalogs, telephone directories, paper bags, and milk and juice cartons)

### **How was the program established?**

Athens-Clarke County (ACC) is home to Georgia's first municipally-operated residential curbside recycling program. In 1995, the Recycling Division introduced a residential Pay-As-You-Throw curbside collection system to approximately 8,600 households. Today, ACC waste haulers offer a collection program to residential customers that decreases the cost of monthly service based on the amount of garbage collected. The variable rate service provides economic incentive to recycle more and generate less. ACC waste haulers offer 32-, 64-, and 96- gallon containers or some combination of the three for heavy waste producers. To further the reach of the program, eight recycling drop-off centers were established. The program also includes commercial curbside and drop-off recycling programs to capture paper, bottles, and cans from local businesses.

### **How is the program administered?**

The Athens-Clarke County (ACC) Recovered Material Processing Facility, established in September 1995, is the cornerstone of the county's waste reduction program. The facility accepts recyclables in two clean, commingled streams: paper (including newspapers, magazines, paper bags, paperboard, catalogs, telephone books, paperback books, hardcover books, office paper, milk/juice cartons, greeting cards, corrugated cardboard, and direct mail), and bottles and cans.

FCR, Inc., the owner and operator of the ACC recycling facility, separates, bales, and markets all recovered materials. ACC has a put-or-pay contract with FCR to deliver a minimum of 775 tons of recyclables each month. The county pays all processing costs and the organizations split revenues from the sale of the materials (80/20). This arrangement provides incentives to both entities to maximize the recovery of recyclables.

In August 2007 ACC received a grant from the Georgia Department of Community Affairs for three recycling event trailers, each containing 100 recycling bins. The trailers are used to collect recyclable at all events sponsored by the county or held on county property. In its first year, the trailers accounted for more than 5 tons of recyclables.

Another successful recovery effort is the county's annual Clean Your Files Day. This bi-annual event encourages government offices and local businesses to be a part of the county's collective efforts to recover more paper for recycling. Over the past eight years more than 160 tons of paper have been collected for recycling during these one-day events.

An additional paper-specific event is the county's annual 'shred event'. Since 2006, more than 13 tons of paper have been shredded and recovered for recycling as a result of this program.

### **How are residents educated?**

The Athens-Clarke County (ACC) Recycling Division's public education efforts include radio (public service announcements and paid advertisements), print (mail, newspapers, and magazines), movie

theater advertisements, speaking engagements, tours of the recycling facility, and two county owned-recycling trucks advertising the benefits of recycling.

In addition, the ACC Recycling Division distributes an environmental resource guide to all county residents. The publication includes information on how to reduce, reuse, and recycle in the community. ACC and Eco-Partners produce an insert for the local newspaper that encourages the reduce, reuse, recycle message.

The Recycling Division also conducts hundreds of outreach programs and recycling facility tours each year reaching thousands of residents. The Division does outreach to k-12 students through its ACC Green Schools program. Additional community outreach programs include: compost workshops (each spring and fall), business and industry recycling roundtables (America Recycles Day), reuse (craft/gift) programs (O'Reuse Tree) for children and adults (each December), and greening our government workshop (each spring). The Recycling Division also provides tours of the landfill and recovered materials processing facility each spring and presents the benefits of recycling to local civic, non-profit, and church groups.

### **How are improvements measured?**

Results of the recycling program are tracked and measured annually. Comparing the annual difference in paper (and bottle and can) tonnages allows the county to quantify successful results, and make adjustments where needed. A comparison of 2007 to 2008 indicated an 11 percent increase in paper tonnage (9,099 tons in 2007 to 10,066 tons in 2008) recovered for recycling in the county. Further, recycling facility operators reported less than three percent contamination, indicating that efforts to educate residents about what and how to recycle is working effectively and efficiently.

### **What partnerships have been formed?**

The Athens-Clarke County recycling program partners with eight surrounding counties, five private haulers, and the University of Georgia to increase materials coming into the recycling facility. These entities deliver their recyclables at no charge, which benefits the needs of the region by keeping recyclables out of the landfills.

### **Additional Resources:**

- Georgia Recycling Coalition [link to [www.georgiarecycles.org](http://www.georgiarecycles.org)]
- Athens-Clarke County [link: <http://www.acc-recycle.org/index.html>]

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