COMMUNITY RECYCLING

Communicating the What? How? Where? and When?

Tips and perspectives from the American Forest & Paper Association
The Paper Recycling Success Story

In 2010, an impressive 87 percent of Americans (268 million) had access to community curbside and/or drop-off paper recycling programs. Following the steps outlined in this guide can help encourage households to take full advantage of their recycling opportunities.
Giving used products new life.

Paper comes from a renewable resource, and – thanks to the commitment of millions of Americans – has become a true recycling success story. In fact, paper recycling reached record heights in the U.S. in 2011, when more than 66 percent of the paper consumed here was recovered for recycling. By utilizing some of the tips outlined in this guide, communities can have even greater success in the area of paper recovery, giving new life to used products such as office paper, cereal boxes, cardboard containers, mail, catalogs, magazines, newspapers and more. Recovered paper is a valuable commodity, and educating residents on what can be recovered, how it should be prepared for collection and when it is collected or can be dropped off all contribute to longer fiber life, decreased disposal costs and a reduction in materials headed to the landfill.

We’re counting on you!
The paper industry has set a goal to exceed 70 percent recovery by 2020, part of an encompassing set of sustainability goals, Better Practices, Better Planet 2020. Help us get there! Learn more at afandpa.org/sustainability.

Tell ‘em how it’s done!

Effective communications are key to the success of your collection program. Virtually all paper and paper-based packaging products are recyclable, but due to a variety of factors, not all are included in every recycling program. As a result, educating residents about several important topics is crucial for paper recycling success:

- **What** items/materials will be collected?
- **How** should those items be prepared for collection?
- **Where** will collection take place?
- **When** will recyclables be collected?

**Communications count!**
If possible, include funds for outreach and education when budgeting for your recycling program.

The same questions should be answered for those with access to recycling drop-off centers to ensure the highest possible quality and quantity of recyclables are being recovered from the waste stream on a consistent basis.
Before you launch a new or revised collection program...

Whether you’re starting from scratch or making changes to an existing collection program, here are a few things that will help you kick things off on the right foot.

Find out what residents know and don’t know about recycling. Conduct a brief survey. This will help you determine the scope of your communications challenge and identify any common misperceptions in your community. Be sure to include demographic information that will allow you to sort data by neighborhood, dwelling type and/or other key variables. You can then target your communications accordingly.

Talk to the experts. Your recycler or waste hauler can help you pinpoint exactly how residents should prepare recyclables and how you can collect them most efficiently. Bear in mind that the simpler the requirements of your recycling program, the more likely residents will be to participate.

Create excitement! Promote a new or existing paper recycling program through the community Facebook page, in your e-mail outreach to residents, in newsletters and during community events.

Target communications. Consider special outreach to individual populations within your community, such as senior citizens and residents for whom English is a second language. You may also need to tailor information for residents of single- versus multi-family dwellings.

For example...
Orange County, NC schedules its paper recovery program for maximum efficiency and effectiveness: Weekly curbside collection in urban areas versus biweekly collection from rural locations, multi-family units, drop-off sites and government buildings.
SPOTLIGHT:

Naval Air Station Whidbey Island
2012 AF&PA Community Recycling Award

Started in 1990 as part of a larger effort to meet changes in the overall way business was conducted at Navy bases across the globe, the paper recycling program at NAS Whidbey Island has raised the bar for paper recovery success and efficiency. Over the last five years, 1,332 tons of paper have been recovered and recycled, including corrugated, newsprint, magazines, books, office papers, shredded paper and training manuals. A multi-prong approach to educating the community includes: events such as Earth Day, America Recycles Day and National Night Out; presentations; the sharing of best practices; electronic brochures and articles; and personal instruction for visitors. Sailors trained at NAS Whidbey Island will have a long-term positive impact on the Navy, as they take their careers and recycling practices to other military bases.

Streamline your brochures, signage, websites and social media efforts.

Use clear, active language. As you work to educate and motivate your residents, try to build a bond to let them know that you’re in it together. Also important – keep it simple. In a world of text messages and Tweets, short, descriptive and succinct is the way to go.

Use visual examples. Show residents what you want and don’t want to see in the collection bin. Clearly divide lists into “Yes” and “No” columns and share photos of each on community websites and outreach materials. Consult with your recycling vendor to compile your “No” list. Common household contaminants can include:

- Food waste
- Glass, wood and metals (including foil)
- Medical or hazardous waste
- Cloth or fabric
- Used tissues, napkins or paper towels
Repeat. Repeat.

Recycling education is an ongoing process and your messages will need regular reinforcement.

**Correct common recycling mistakes.** As your program goes on, you'll be able to identify problems that arise on a regular basis. These can be highlighted on pre-printed “oops” tags, which collection crews leave behind to identify undesired or incorrectly prepared recyclables. Use clear, friendly language to explain the mistake and encourage residents to get more information via your program website or recycling line.

**Create opportunities for free publicity.** Announce recycling statistics (recovery and/or participation rates) and/or hold recycling-themed contests and events. Also take advantage of internet and intranet sites, Facebook pages, Twitter and LinkedIn accounts and more, to ensure that consistent messaging is appearing on all community channels, both to educate and congratulate residents.

**Consider paid placements.** Additional opportunities to get your recycling message out include:

- Local media advertising including TV, radio, newspapers, magazines and billboards
- Banner advertising on popular local websites
- Utility bill or direct mail inserts
- Booths or displays at public events
- Door hangers or other direct-to-resident materials
- Contests
- Marketing emails driving traffic to website or Facebook page with program details

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**Is it working?**

Solicit feedback from your recycling vendor or waste haulter to make sure your residents are collecting the right materials the right way.

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**Share your success!**

Want to gain national and local attention for your paper recycling success? Apply for an annual AF&PA Recycling Award, which recognizes outstanding community, business and school paper recovery programs. Find award criteria and prize and deadline details — along with highlights on previous winners — on paperrecycles.org.
Refine your efforts.

Once your program is up and running, explore opportunities to increase efficiencies and expand your reach. Partnerships with local businesses and community organizations can help leverage your program’s resources, support your educational outreach and keep recycling top-of-mind among your residents.

Keep up the good work!

To supplement your efforts, visit paperrecycles.org for the latest case studies, statistics, videos, interactive features and more.

SPOTLIGHT:
Onondaga County Resource Recovery Agency (OCRRA)
2011 AF&PA Community Recycling Award

OCRRA is a non-profit public benefit corporation that has successfully managed Onondaga County (NY) solid waste programs for the last 20 years. A comprehensive education and outreach program has helped the 450,000-member community achieve new heights in recycling, including the recovery of 165,000 tons of paper and paper-based packaging in 2010.

Curbside collection, drop-off locations, annual “Shred-O-Rama” and book recycling events are all staples of the OCRRA paper recovery program. Further contributing to the success is comprehensive outreach and education, including multi-media advertising, newsletters, emails and Facebook fan page updates.

Recovering more per capita than any other large community in New York, OCRRA relies on engagement with businesses, schools and apartment complexes to achieve outstanding levels of community-wide recycling.