



Staten Island Advance

Next recycling targets: clothing, lawn trimmings

The city wants to divert 12,500 tons of fabrics and organic materials from landfills each year

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By **GLENN NYBACK**
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STATEN ISLAND, N.Y. -- One person's trash is another's treasured threads. To that end, the city wants residents to recycle their unwanted sweatshirts, sweaters and socks, putting a dent in the 195,000 tons of clothing that annually winds up at the curb -- not to mention the \$16.57 million in tribute paid to out-of-state landfills.

In order for the city to reach its goal of recycling a quarter of its trash by year's end, Staten Islanders will need to do more than just increase the quantities of paper, metal, plastic and glass they set out each week.

Besides clothing, the city's new Office of Recycling Outreach and Education (OROE) plans to help folks find ways to recycle lawn trimmings and brush. Textiles and organic materials have been found to be among the most voluminous non-recycled portion of the city's 12,500 tons of daily residential trash.

"I think a lot of people have forgotten that there are options to disposal," said David Hurd, director of the OROE. "If we are effectively able to capture a good fraction, that could have a significant impact," Hurd said.

The OROE, created by the mayor's office, is charged with reaching the city's 8.2 million residents and educating them about the Sanitation Department's recycling laws and why they're needed -- and also to think of ways to lighten the city's trash load by recycling items not included in the curbside recycling program, Hurd said.

Through public outreach campaigns, residents will be asked, voluntarily, to donate clothing, shoes and blankets to organizations like the Salvation Army, Goodwill and local church clothing drives, Hurd said. The OROE also will begin a weekly textile collection program at the Union Square Greenmarket in Manhattan this spring, which ultimately will be expanded to other locations around the city.

The OROE also plans to help people find ways to recycle organic materials such as yard waste.

SELF-COMPOSTING

On Staten Island, grass, tree limbs and shrubs represented nearly 14 percent of the borough's trash in the spring of 2005.

Hurd said his office will promote self-composting, whereby residents, using backyard bins, can compost grass, leaves and prunings year-round. A task force will identify whether large-scale composting facilities can be built around the city, making it feasible to collect yard and food waste through a regular curbside collection program, he said.

Sanitation, which already collects leaves in November and Christmas trees in January, will conduct a pilot program this spring in which residents will be asked to put yard trimmings at the curb for special collection. If successful, the program could be exported to other boroughs.

Hurd said his office plans to urge residents to bring all their unwanted televisions, computers and cell phones to Sanitation's annual electronics recycling event in the fall instead of chucking them in the trash. New Jersey legislators are considering making it illegal for residents to throw out electronics, but no such law has yet been considered in the city.

And by encouraging people to use Dumpsters instead of setting construction debris at the curb for

collection, a good chunk of trash would not have to be landfilled.

The Office of Recycling Outreach and Education had its origins in the city's 20-year solid waste management plan that was approved by the City Council in July 2006. Hurd, who has 27 years of experience in recycling outreach, assumed his post in December.

A Waste Characterization Study will help OROE identify ways to reduce the quantity of garbage that needs to be shipped to out-of-state landfills for disposal, Hurd said.

The Office of Recycling Outreach and Education -- by targeting one community district per borough at a time -- plans to reach building superintendents, condo and co-op boards, tenants associations, senior centers, community groups and individual homeowners by "blitzing" them with recycling literature and face-to-face outreach, Hurd said. (A community district, of which there are 59 citywide -- three on Staten Island -- comprises the same area as a community board.)

One outreach coordinator is being hired for each borough and should be on the job by month's end, Hurd said.

"I look at our role filling the gaps between what [Sanitation officials] are able to do and what they are unable to do," Hurd said, adding that increasing each resident's recycling habits by more than 50 percent in one year is attainable. Currently, the city recycles about 16 percent of its waste stream.

"We're going to try to exhaust every public outreach technique there is to reach residents," he said. "It's an ambitious goal. We're going to strive to achieve it."

RECYCLING CHALLENGE

Robert Lange, director of Sanitation's Bureau of Waste Prevention, Reuse and Recycling, said the OROE faces a large challenge trying to get people to recycle more.

"Going door-to-door . . . is a challenge in a city this big," he said, adding that Sanitation has tried, since the recycling program began in 1990, to get people to comply by rolling out advertising campaigns through different avenues like the mail and television.

Lange said Sanitation welcomes the additional help from an office that will be able to devote all of its resources to recycling education.

But "it's partly in control of each and every New Yorker," he said, adding that the OROE's success is dependent on the city's residents. "We really need everyone to participate at the highest level they can. We need the help of every New Yorker."

City Councilman Michael McMahon (D-North Shore) praised the city's decision to create the OROE, emphasizing his contention that Sanitation never fully got a public outreach program off the ground.

"Education is a critical component for the success of recycling," McMahon said, noting that having an outreach coordinator in each borough will go a long way toward getting the word out. "It's critical to help take recycling to the next step."

While a 25 percent recycling rate might be "lofty," McMahon said it's important to have ambitious goals.

"We certainly have to break 20 and move in the direction of 25 percent," he said. "If we hit 23 percent, they get an A. If we hit 25 percent, they get an A+."

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