



City of San Antonio

Agenda Memorandum

File Number: 18-1850

Agenda Item Number: 4.

Agenda Date: 2/13/2018

In Control: Community Health and Equity Committee

DEPARTMENT: Solid Waste Management Department

DEPARTMENT HEAD: David W. McCary

COUNCIL DISTRICTS IMPACTED: City-wide

SUBJECT:

Recycling Update and Proposed Fee for Diapers in Recycling and Organics Carts

SUMMARY:

The recycling market has shifted from a volume driven low quality standard commodities to a high quality standard requiring greater restrictions and controls to sell recyclables on the open market. The higher quality standards are impacting the recycling industry and present the need for SWMD to propose a \$50 contamination fee for diapers placed in the recycling or organics carts.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

The City of San Antonio's recycling program began with a pilot program in 1993, and went city-wide in 1995. Customers were provided manually collected 18-gallon green recycling bins. At that time, contamination (such as trash and other non-recyclable materials) was not an issue. Between 2007 and 2010, the City converted to an automated collection system and provided residents with a 96-gallon garbage cart and a 96-gallon recycling cart. As a result, recycling tonnages increased and SWMD began an education campaign to ensure that residents knew how to recycle correctly.

Today, the recycling market standard is demanding high quality commodities, so contaminated recycling is being rejected and sent to landfills. San Antonio's contamination rate has always fluctuated; last year, contamination was as high as 28%. The Department implemented a strong program consisting of outreach and enforcement to address this issue. Currently the contamination rate is approximately 18%, which is approaching out target goal of 15% contamination or less.

Out of all of the contaminants, San Antonio has a particular problem with dirty diapers being placed into the recycling cart. Diapers are not recyclable; they belong in the brown cart. Although diapers are a small part of the contamination stream in recycling, they are significant. First, dirty diapers are a health hazard to the workers that have to remove them by hand. Second, Recommunity, the City's recycling processor, charges the City approximately \$1.2 million annually for the negative impact diapers have on their ability to process and sell materials.

In response to the contamination concern, in 2015 the City Council approved a \$25 contamination collection fee to residents who, after being warned about the mistakes, continue to place major sources of contamination in their recycling carts, including diapers and trash. These fees are assessed by Route Inspectors who observe the contamination through audits of individual carts on the collection routes. This fee and the warnings that inspectors administer have been successful in reducing the overall contamination rate, however diaper contamination has not seen an improvement. In fact, diaper processing has increased from 53 lbs. per hour in August 2016 to 103 lbs. per hour in November 2017.

The Department intends to build on the program success of the \$25 fee and proposes a new \$50 contamination fee specifically for diapers only, placed into the recycling or organics carts.

ISSUE:

The Solid Waste Management Department proposes to amend the City Code, Chapter 14, to authorize a \$50 contamination fee specifically for diapers placed into the recycling or organics cart and that the fee may be assessed without servicing the contaminated cart. The Department also proposes to amend the City Code, Chapter 14, to clarify that the current \$25 contamination fee will continue to be assessed for other contaminants and may be assessed without servicing the contaminated cart.

SWMD will continue existing communications and outreach programs, including the utilizing the current inspections teams and departmental marketing. The Department will also focus education on those populations that most likely contribute to the diaper contamination.

ALTERNATIVES:

Should the Committee not forward this item to the full Council for consideration, it is anticipated that the City will see no immediate or significant reduction in dirty diaper contamination in the recycling stream.

FISCAL IMPACT:

No fiscal impact. This is a briefing item only.

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends amending the City Code, Chapter 14, to include a \$50 contamination fee specifically for diapers placed in the recycling or organics carts and clarifying that the current \$25 contamination fee will be assessed for other contaminants. With committee support, this item shall be forwarded to the full City Council for consideration.