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# Mandatory recycling laws grow in popularity

By Vince Bond Jr.  
WRN reporter

Cleveland residents generate about 230,000 tons of trash annually, but it's not clear how many LeBron James jerseys were included in that figure since the former Cavaliers superstar bolted to the Miami Heat in July 2010.

Many jerseys for the often-vilified athlete went up in flames or, in some cases, were dragged through the streets of Cleveland like the head of a dethroned king.

"I saw a truck the other day. Someone had the jersey tied to the bumper," said Ron Owens, Cleveland's waste collection commissioner. "It's still holding up after being dragged for several years."

Cleveland's waste officials hope their mandatory recycling initiative has even more longevity.

Cleveland has joined a growing list of cities around the country that have mandated recycling for all residents.

The city has expanded its curbside recycling program by 25,000 to 30,000 homes every year since 2009, and the rollout will continue until all 152,000 households are participating, part of a five-year plan. The city has been using radio frequency identification (RFID) technology since September to keep track of those who aren't recycling.

Under Seattle's mandatory recycling policy, haulers won't even collect people's garbage if it contains more than 10% recyclables.

The mandate is nothing new in Pennsylvania, which passed Act 101 in 1988 requiring cities to implement curbside recycling. Around 70% of Pittsburgh residents recycle, but officials say there is room for improvement.

## Recycling heating up

In Cleveland, Owens cited the recycling program's hefty \$25 million cost as one of the major hurdles to getting started.

He said Mayor Frank G. Jackson committed \$5 million in capital funding each year for recycling, with half used for new recycling carts for residents and the other portion going toward automating the city's refuse fleet.

Residents are given 96-gallon black or gray carts for regular trash and 64-gallon blue carts for recyclables. At the moment, 40,000 households are recycling in Cleveland, but an additional 30,000 will be added on June 4, Owens said.

For those who live in areas that aren't yet serviced, there are more than 130 locations where individuals and businesses can drop off commingled recyclables.

"The city of Cleveland is dedicated to recycling," Owens said. "We're going to move forward in that effort and encourage everybody to recycle as much as they can. I think it's going to be a win-win for the city once we become citywide with this program."



Courtesy, City of Pittsburgh

Recycling collection workers pick up commodities at the curb in Pittsburgh recently. Pennsylvania passed Act 101 in 1988 requiring cities to implement curbside recycling. Some cities, such as Cleveland and Seattle, fine residents for repeatedly failing to recycle.

Last year, the city collected 6,000 tons of recyclables. The city has already surpassed that mark in 2012.

Residents are recycling at a 16% to 17% clip, and the city is monitoring participation with RFID tags within their recycling carts.

"We know each time we tip the recycling cart," Owens said. "If they haven't recycled in four weeks time, we'll review those records and the next time we go out to their home and they still haven't recycled, they'll be issued a violation. That violation is basically a \$100 fine."

Owens said as much as 62% of Cleveland's yearly 230,000 tons of waste can be captured through recycling, which could generate additional cash. Last year, the recycling program made \$504,000 while saving \$225,000 in avoided landfill costs, he said.

The city sends its recyclables to Greenstar Recycling's facility in Pittsburgh, where it fetches the market rate of \$68 per ton. Under its contract with Greenstar, the city has a minimum guarantee of \$21 per ton regardless of where the market stands.

Owens said his ultimate goal is for Cleveland to have its own materials recovery facility, where it could double or triple recycling profits.

"With my recycling revenue I'm generating on a monthly basis, I'm depositing around \$33,000 to \$35,000 each month. To me, that represents one [job] I'm saving each month," Owens said. "I would encourage any large city to look at their recycling program. If you have any large volume of material you should be able to make some money off of it."

## Emerald City, Steel City

Seattle instituted its mandatory recycling effort in January 2005 by banning all recyclables from garbage containers.

A year later, the city adopted a rule where residents who put too many recyclables in the garbage found their carts left full at the curb on collection day.

When Seattle officials signed the mandate into law in 2003 – it didn't go into effect until 2005 – the recycling rate was 38%, but it

rose to 54% over the next nine years, according to Brett Stav, senior planning and development specialist for Seattle Public Utilities.

Mandatory composting fortified the green effort in 2009, when Seattle went from a bi-weekly schedule to a weekly one.

Its goal is to reach an overall recycling rate – made up of single family, multifamily, self haul and commercial streams – of 60% this year and 70% by 2025.

"Our residential recycling rate is at 70%. We've had a profoundly high measure of compliance," Stav said. "We haven't had to fine hardly anybody."

Since 2010, tailgaters at Pittsburgh Steelers games have been able to recycle in the parking lot of Heinz Field, said Shawn Wigle, a recycling supervisor for the city.

The "Let's Tackle Recycling" campaign, which is funded by aluminum company Alcoa Inc., is a partnership among several organizations, including Pittsburgh's Environmental Services, Greenstar Recycling and Heinz Field. Major League Baseball's Pittsburgh Pirates and the National Hockey League's Pittsburgh Penguins also have committed to sustainability in recent years.

Wigle said the challenges for the state's recycling mandate have been the same since day one: educating residents and making sure people are complying.

Education efforts include newsletters sent out twice a year, a recycling website, social media and reaching out to neighborhood groups.

Pittsburgh's diversion rate had been around 18%, but a switch to single-stream recycling in 2008 has helped improve it, Wigle said.

The Steel City's recycling collection costs are \$2 million a year. "Certainly, there's a cost involved. From our standpoint, no matter what, you have to collect the material. For us, it's certainly something that we value," Wigle said. "After you collect the material, you're not paying to landfill it. It's double savings for us." ■

Contact Waste & Recycling News reporter Vince Bond at vbond@crain.com or 313-446-1653.

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