



Automated collection catching on in the suburbs

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The new automated collection program is successful and saving money for Billerica, Burlington, Tewksbury and Tyngsboro.

The four towns all switched their trash-collection systems to automated trucks as of July 1. Households in each town received a wheeled cart for their trash as part of the new program. The automated truck has an arm that picks up the wheeled cart without the driver having to leave the vehicle. The new program is safer for the driver, and saves time and money in the collection process.

Billerica residents have been quick to adapt to the new program, according to Steve Robertson, the town's Department of Public Works operations supervisor.

Likewise, the conversion went smoothly in Burlington, according to John Sanchez, that town's DPW superintendent.

Many residents are recycling a lot more by using their old barrels to hold recyclable bottles and cans, buying a new recycling bin for paper, or both.

Mary Delahanty, Billerica's recycling coordinator, reports that "recycling stickers are very popular," and fewer than 100 people -- less than 1 percent of households -- have purchased second carts.

In the other towns, it's a similar story.

"The town looks much cleaner and neater on trash

day," according to Abdul Alkhatib, Billerica's DPW director.

An added bonus for the town budget is that the new program encourages residents to recycle because if their trash exceeds the capacity of the wheeled cart, there is a cost. Each town set a different fee system, but overflow bags can cost as much as \$5 per bag (in Tyngsboro).

Each town has a different policy on additional carts, but a second cart can cost as much as \$265 per year.

The trash tonnage in the first month, July 2009, dropped significantly in all four towns compared to the normal amount for that month.

For Billerica, trash tonnage decreased from 1,380 tons in July 2008 to 1,007 tons this past July, a 27 percent reduction. For Burlington, the trash tonnage decreased from 850 tons to 581 tons, or 32 percent. For Tewksbury, trash tonnage dropped from 1,182 tons to 868 tons, a reduction of 27 percent. And for Tyngsboro, which already had implemented a 3-bag limit on trash, the reduction was less dramatic, dropping from 401 tons to 353 tons, a 12 percent reduction.

Should those results continue, each community will save on disposal costs.

"In a year when other costs are increasing, the savings from the trash program are very important to balancing the town's budget," said Tyngsboro Town Administrator Rosemary Cashman.

In Tewksbury, according to Town Manager David Cressman, the cost savings on trash collection and disposal allowed the town to incorporate the condominium complexes into the municipal trash collection and recycling system. As long as the

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condos are participating in the recycling program, they were included in the new trash-collection program. Previously, Tewksbury had been reimbursing condo complexes for private disposal services.

The towns' staff and the hauler are working together to enforce the new regulations that require residents to use only the official trash barrels and overflow bags. Incidents of excessive trash piled on top of the barrels or overfilling of barrels is being addressed on a case-by-case basis with stickers, notices and by leaving the excess trash behind.

Residents are asked to make sure barrel lids are closed to keep out animals and water and to prevent litter.

Information for this column was provided by Carolyn Dann, municipal assistance and regional recycling coordinator for the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection.

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