

One-side-of-the-street garbage collection

Monica Bramble
 Solid Waste Manager
 City of North Port, Florida
 Member, APWA Solid Waste Management Committee

- 28,273 homes
- 103 square miles
- Automated garbage collected one time per week

What happens when an innovative idea is embraced by public servants and the community? In North Port, Florida, it built a more sustainable city. The idea was one-side-of-the-street garbage collection, which was piloted then implemented city-wide. The benefits couldn't be ignored: less fuel usage, savings in route time and lower overall emissions. Not to mention, the satisfaction that everyone is helping to better their community.

The vision for the idea began taking shape in the summer of 2008. Florida was in the midst of an economic crunch, diesel was reaching a high of \$4.80/gallon and everyone was looking for ways to cut costs. A few citizens and City solid waste drivers suggested collecting garbage from one side of

North Port side loader



the street. Since North Port Solid Waste already used automated garbage trucks that collect from the right side of the vehicle, the truck would only have to drive down one side of the street to dump each tote. To save costs, residents were asked to place garbage totes on the same side of the street to eliminate the necessity of traveling each road twice. The driver's efficiency would increase, fuel and maintenance costs would be saved and there would be a decrease in emissions. The idea looked good on paper, but in practice some customer convenience would be lost. The question became, "Will the community accept this new method for garbage collection?"

Trying out a new idea

With approval from North Port City Commission, a pilot program began in September 2008. Three types of neighborhoods were selected to participate in the one-side-of-the-street garbage collection pilot: urban, rural and gated communities. From the beginning, those residents on busy streets, in cul-de-sacs, on assisted service or on streets where the garbage truck had to logistically travel twice were excluded. Information on the pilot was distributed to the media and placed on the City's website. A week before the resident started the program, a letter was left on their garbage tote explaining the idea and giving directions for what the resident was to do on their next collection day.

On the day the new collection method was implemented, a Solid



North Port totes

Waste Supervisor drove in front of the automated garbage truck to make sure the garbage totes were on the proper side of the street. If not, the supervisor moved it to the correct side and placed a friendly reminder notice on the tote after it was dumped. During the second week of implementation, the driver was tasked with moving any misplaced totes and leaving a reminder notice. By the third week, as a result of the notice and the fact that the misplaced totes were left on the collection side of the street and not returned to the resident's home, most of the totes were placed on the proper side of the street.

Data and opinions

Prior to and during the first eight weeks of the pilot program, operational data on route time and fuel usage were collected to quantify how much of a savings one-side-of-the-street garbage collection could generate if implemented city-wide. In addition, a survey was conducted to get public opinion on the new collection method. The questions were targeted to gather the following information:

- Was one-sided collection in a particular neighborhood, i.e., rural, urban or gated community, unacceptable?

- Did rolling the tote across the street create a negative opinion of the program?
- Did having the neighbor place their tote on the resident's side of the street create a negative opinion of the program?
- Would the resident support going to this collection method full-time?

There were over 1,820 homes in the pilot area and, interestingly, only 26 of these residents responded to the survey. Nine supported the new method, seven opposed it and 10 were unsure. An additional 78 residents not in the pilot area also responded, with the majority worried that having to work with their neighbor would cause problems. The survey results showed that residents who changed to one-side-of-the-street garbage collection did so without much concern.

Going city-wide

Presented with results of the pilot program and the lack of opposition against it, North Port City Commission approved full implementation of one-side-of-the-street garbage collection. City-wide implementation occurred over a nine-month period using the same system as in the pilot program.

Media releases were sent out and information was placed on the City's website about the new program. A tool was also added to the City's website where a resident could look up their street by collection day and see the week when conversion to the one-side-of-the-street collection would take place.

Through the nine-month conversion, customer service staff fielded resident calls and supervisors met with residents to resolve any problems. The most common question was, "Why do I have to take my tote across the street when there are more houses on my

side?" Once it was explained that the most efficient routing incorporated the entire neighborhood, not just one street, and they were shown the routing map, the residents were satisfied.

Quality of life improved

Eight years later, one-side-of-the-street collection is just a way of life in North Port with plenty of benefits. Route efficiency decreased fuel usage, emissions and truck wear-and-tear.

The most amazing part of this process was the ease in which the community embraced one-side-of-the-street collection. There were a few neighbor conflicts that had to be worked out but for every negative call about the program, there were two calls praising the innovative idea. City of North Port residents were asked to make a change and wholeheartedly did their part to improve the quality of life in their community.

What's next?

North Port is now looking to automate the dual-stream recycling collection. A pilot program began the end of January and if successful, will go city-wide. Of course, recycling totes will be placed on one side of the street so the same efficiencies realized in automated garbage collection will occur with automated recycling collection.

Monica Bramble can be reached at mbramble@cityofnorthport.com.

Efficiencies gained over eight years by one-side-of-the-street garbage collection:

- Number of daily routes decreased: 2
- Fuel Savings: \$335,975
- Miles Decreased: 290,160
- CO₂ Emissions Eliminated: 2,170,272 lbs.