

Portland Recycles!
Residential recycling communications plan 2008

Overview

The City of Portland Oregon is launching its Portland Recycles! Plan, which includes strategies for reducing waste, increasing recycling, saving energy and reducing harmful emissions. The Portland City Council adopted the portions of the Plan that address residential recycling, waste prevention and City operations, but directed the Portland Office of Sustainable Development to re-examine options for the commercial collection system that would better support broader sustainability goals. The City is planning a major outreach and education campaign in the spring and summer of 2008 to support changes to residential recycling called for in the Plan. Implementation of the new system also provides opportunities for education about proper recycling and contamination.

Situation analysis

Portland enjoys a recycling rate that is among the highest in the nation. Yet, in the past decade, the amount of waste generated has increased 44 percent, while the recycling rate has leveled off. Participation in curbside recycling is high, and yet people continued to put contaminants in their recyclables (plastic bags, plastic tubs, glass in with paper, miscellaneous other non-curbside recyclable items.)

In order to increase recycling, the City of Portland is preparing to implement a new recycling system that changes the way people living in single-family residences and four-plex households have been recycling for the past 16 years. While some aspects of the system remain unchanged, key elements will be different. The major aspects of the current system and the new system being implemented in the spring and summer of 2008 are compared below:

CURRENT SYSTEM	NEW SYSTEM
2 yellow bins	1 65-gallon roll cart
Some customers commingle in the bins (except glass and motor oil); others sort recyclables per hauler's instructions	All materials except glass and motor oil commingled in the roll cart
Glass on the side in a rigid container	Glass on the side in one of the old yellow bins, or a rigid container
Yard debris put out in customer's barrel	Yard debris put out in hauler-provided roll cart
Excluded materials include yogurt/margarine tubs, plastic pots, buckets	Yogurt/margarine tubs, plastic pots and buckets now included
No plastic bags	No plastic bags

Opportunities and challenges

In considering a communications strategy, the new system provides various opportunities and challenges:

Opportunities:

- Support for the new system is high
- People like the ease and convenience of putting everything in one container
- Studies show that the roll carts increase recycling
- People like the ease of rolling the carts to the curb
- People like the lid that keeps recyclables dry
- The large roll carts provide the opportunity for less frequent set-outs

Challenges

- Studies show that some people are concerned about the size of the roll carts
- The recycling roll carts look similar to trash cans
- People have an “emotional connection” to their bins
- Lids obscure the recyclables from view; haulers can’t see contaminants
- People remain confused about plastic bags, plastic tubs, proper separation of glass, and other materials not accepted in curbside recycling
- People think they know how to recycle, and may not be receptive to information
- If the hauler picks up recyclables mixed with contaminants, the customer believes the contaminants must be recyclable
- People may think their recyclables are being trashed, since they are commingled

Communication goals

- Educate people about the new roll cart system and proper set-out requirements
- Create excitement and enthusiasm for the new system
- Address concerns, questions and resistance to change
- Decrease contamination of plastics and glass through repetition and consistency of information and reinforcement/correction at the curb

Primary messages

- Roll carts make recycling easier and more convenient
- Roll carts will help you recycle more

Secondary messages

- You can commingle all materials in the cart, except glass and motor oil
- It’s very important to keep glass on the side and don’t put in plastic bags

Communication strategies

Communication tools and strategies should be simple and direct. Visuals should be strong and prevalent to emphasize the key components of the new system and to reach non-English speakers. A mix of media, prompts and printed material over a three-to-four-month period should be reinforced by corrective action at the point of recycling – the curb.

Recognizing that many people think they know how to recycle and are doing it correctly, all communications should include reminders about glass and plastic bags. The timing of communications should align as closely as possible with delivery of the roll carts, so that people can immediately put into action the information they’ll receive about the new system.

Communication strategies can be refined once the campaign budget is set, and could include the following:

Public relations:

- Press releases to the Oregonian, Community Newspapers, neighborhood newsletters
- Earth Day media event with Saltzman
- Media event coinciding with delivery of first carts
- Demonstrations and information provided at neighborhood cleanups, fairs
- In My Opinion piece

Customer information and support:

- Refrigerator magnet
- Printed handout delivered with cart
- Information on OSD's and Metro's websites
- Increased support on OSD's, Metro's and haulers' hotlines

Paid media

- Transit, bus sides and bus backs – citywide coverage, highly visible
- Newspaper ads – reinforces other media, reader associates it with news content; can target by zone or zip
- Radio – creative radio script would reach people at home, at work, while traveling to/from work.

TIMELINE – December 2007 through July 2008

	DEC.	JAN.	FEB.	MAR.	APR.	MAY	JUNE	JULY
ACTIVITY								
Winter Curbsider	X						X	
Delivery of cards re: glass and plastics in current system (consider inclusion of a reminder about other no-nos)		X	X					
"Carts are coming!" cards left on bins container					X	X	X	
Roll carts delivered						X	X	X
Magnet and brochure delivered with carts						X	X	X
Summer Curbsider							X	
OSD website additions				X	X	X	X	X
Press releases, stories in community and neighborhood newsletters					X	X	X	X
Community events						X	X	X
MEDIA								
Transit					X	X	X	X
Radio					X	X	X	X
Newspaper ads					X	X	X	X

Purpose and delivery method of each communication tool

Winter Curbsider article – December 2007

- Preview of roll carts
- Highlights of surveys, pilot and focus group
- Reminder about plastics
- Summary of Portland Recycles! Plan

Summer Curbsider article – June 2008

- Reminder about recycling protocols
- Story on how recyclables are sorted at MRF
- Reminder about plastics
- Testimonials from customers, Q and A

Reminder cards about glass and plastic – January-February 2008

- Last chance to reinforce messages about glass plastic before roll carts
- Could include sneak preview of roll carts coming in spring

“Carts are coming” cards – April-June 2008

- Preview of roll carts, when they’ll arrive, how you use them
- Warms up the audience for what’s to come
- Prompt people to seek information early, go to OSD website for information

Magnet and brochure or flier – May-July, with delivery of roll carts

- In-home prompt and reminder
- Illustrates basic do’s and don’ts of recycling
- Provides another reminder about plastic bags and glass
- Provides a visual reference about what goes where

Transit advertisement – April-June

- Generate excitement and awareness about roll carts, commingling, tubs
- Catchy headline/tagline and visuals serve as “kick off” for new system
- Bus shelters could include visual that reinforces “no-sorting, easy set-out” benefits
- Buses come out of three Portland Tri-Met yards

Radio ads – April-June

- Generate excitement and awareness about roll carts, commingling, ease
- Catchy headline/tagline and visuals serve as “kick off” for new system
- Direct people to website for more information

Newspaper advertisement – April-June

- Uses tagline and graphic approach used in transit advertising
- Distinctive shape (die cut in shape of cart) will get people’s attention
- Allows for a bit more information to be provided than transit or radio
- Can distribute by zip code, allowing message to be highly targeted

Proposed budget

The proposed budget is \$125,000 to \$150,000. Budget covers creative development, graphic design of collateral, and production of bus cards and radio spots. Budget excludes production costs for the June Curbsider, since it’s already a regular communication.