

## Seattle Zero Waste Initiative

Goal: To move the dial in a significant way on municipal waste reduction.

Vision: Leading cities are introducing Zero Waste Initiatives, including Seattle, Boulder, Oakland and Austin, with strategies that identify high-level changes in operations to save money on landfill and waste hauling fees while meeting new goals to improve environmental performance.

Leading practice: **The City of Seattle (pop. 582,000) formed a Zero Waste Working Group** with department heads and outside consultants at City Hall in 2003 (preceded by the city adopting a Zero Waste Resolution in 1998).

The Zero Waste Working Group, led by consultants URS Corp., was tasked with figuring out how to meet a new (city) **goal for its residents to divert 60% of their waste from landfill disposal** (by comparison, Cuyahoga County residential and commercial recycling rate is 50%). The group identified 165 potential new strategies, with 124 tabbed for further consideration. Partially driving Seattle's Zero Waste Initiative was a goal to avoid building a third waste transfer station and to redesign their two existing stations. The city and consultants took an asset management approach with detailed analysis of low, medium and high cost-benefit for each recommendation.

The Zero Waste project team did not attempt to evaluate the effectiveness of the implementation of the 60% program, nor the cost effectiveness. In fact, the Zero Waste team was impressed with the City's level of analysis, implementation plan, and ability to maintain budget and level of service goals while carrying out the components of the plan.

Critics say the city took a somewhat heavy handed approach to ramming through mandatory programs, such as 2009's mandatory curbside food waste collection and composting program. The city is also considering a ban on construction and demolition debris at its collection centers, but it remains to be seen how progress will be affected by the defeat of a plastic bag levy and Mayor Nichols' waning support in 2009.

Lessons? The political power base needs to be developed in Northeast Ohio first. We need a broad awareness campaign and/or a smaller community with similar values to take on a pilot project (i.e. Cleveland Heights or Lakewood and curbside food collection and composting).

City of Seattle press release introducing its Zero Waste strategy  
<http://www.seattle.gov/council/newsdetail.asp?ID=7438&Dept=28>