

Frequently Asked Questions about Recycling, Recycling Carts, and Basic Trash Service in Saint Louis County

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1) What Changes Were Made To The Waste Code?

In December of 2006, the Saint Louis County Council voted unanimously to make two significant changes to the county waste code:

First, the code was changed to define basic trash service as including three components: 1) once-per-week trash collection; 2) once-per-week recycling collection; and 3) twice-yearly bulky pickup. This definition is known technically as the "minimum level of service", and all licensed haulers are now required to provide these three components whenever they provide basic trash service to any residence in Saint Louis County.

Second, the code was changed to authorize the establishment of trash hauling districts in the unincorporated portions of Saint Louis County. A single trash hauler could then be selected for each district through a competitive bidding process, whereby the lowest responsible bidder in each trash district would be designated the sole trash hauler for that district. (Subsequently, provisions were set up to allow particular subdivisions to opt out if a majority of trustees in that subdivision voted to do so.)

2) Why Were Changes Made To The Waste Code?

There are a number of reasons why changes were made to the waste code in December of 2006. The two main reasons were: 1) to keep waste hauling rates low by prolonging the lifespan of our existing landfills; and, 2) to respond to citizen complaints about trash and about too many garbage trucks driving through unincorporated county neighborhoods.

All around the country, trash hauling rates are increasing substantially as landfills fill up and have to be closed, requiring the construction of new landfills, often miles from where the trash is being collected. Every additional mile between a landfill and the point of trash collection increases the overall cost – especially with today’s fuel prices.

The Saint Louis area currently enjoys some of the lowest waste disposal rates in the nation, and the county wanted to keep it that way. To do so, it had to encourage more participation in recycling programs to lengthen the expected lifespan of our current landfills.

Under the old system, those who wanted to do the right thing by recycling actually had to pay extra for recycling collection, while those who were dumping all their trash in our landfills were paying a lower bill. To remedy this, weekly recycling collection was made a part of basic trash service in Saint Louis County. The new waste code now defines basic trash service as including the following three components: 1) weekly trash collection; 2) weekly recycling collection; and 3) twice-yearly bulky pickup.

However, two other problems remained: 1) how to reduce the number of trash trucks on the streets in unincorporated Saint Louis County; and, 2) how to keep rates low even with the new basic service level being added to the waste code. The solution was to establish eight (8) trash districts for the purpose of selecting a single hauler for each through a competitive bidding process. Ideally, this would reduce the number of trucks on the streets, while ensuring that rates for the new basic service level would be competitive with existing rates.

The first district to go through the competitive bidding process was Trash District #3. Veolia was the winning bidder. Beginning on July 1st, the monthly rate for basic trash service from Veolia in Trash District #3 will only be \$11.60 a month, and for seniors only \$10.44 because of a 10% discount. (In the second year of the contract, Veolia’s monthly charge will be \$11.95, and in the third year, \$12.31.)

Even though this new rate includes the three components now included in basic trash service (weekly trash collection, weekly recycling collection, and two bulky pickups), this new rate is as low as, or even lower than, many were paying just for weekly trash collection before the change.

In short, changes were made to the waste code to accomplish three goals – 1) increased recycling; 2) fewer trucks on the road; and 3) comparable prices despite the changes. The outcome in Trash District #3 demonstrates that the plan is working as intended.

3) Why Has My Trash Bill Gone Up?

All trash hauling rates in Saint Louis County are set by the private trash haulers. The county does not set, regulate, or monitor trash rates (except when there is an allegation that a particular hauler is charging unreasonably high rates).

There are a number of factors that can affect trash hauling rates, including the price of fuel, the number of customers in a geographic area, and the number of services being provided to customers. Some haulers have recently felt it necessary to raise their rates to cover the cost of providing the new basic level of service defined by the county waste code. The code now requires that basic trash service include – at a minimum – the following three components: 1) weekly trash collection; 2) weekly recycling collection; and 3) twice-yearly bulky pickup.

Despite the recent increases, the trash districting program for unincorporated Saint Louis County is expected to bring trash hauling rates back down. In the one district for which a single hauler has already been selected (Trash District #3), the winning bid was awarded to Veolia who will only be charging \$11.60 a month for basic trash service during the first year of the contract – a rate lower than some were paying previously just for weekly trash collection. In addition, senior citizens (those older than 65) will receive a 10% across-the-board discount on their bill. (The monthly rate for basic trash service in District #3 will be \$11.95 in the second year, and \$12.31 in the third year.)

The other seven (7) trash districts are undergoing the competitive bidding process in May. While the county cannot guarantee rates as low as in Trash District #3, we remain optimistic that the bids will at least be in the same ball park.

4) Why Wasn't This Voted On?

Ordinance changes to the waste code do not require a vote of the people. However, a body of elected officials – the Saint Louis County Council – did vote unanimously in December of 2006 to enact the new provisions.

5) Why Do I Have To Pay For Recycling If I Don't Recycle?

Recycling is one of the most effective ways to keep our trash hauling rates low in the long run by prolonging the lifespan of our existing landfill. People who recycle are helping to keep our trash rates low. Not recycling only hastens the arrival of the much higher trash rates that will occur when it becomes necessary to find a location for, and build, a new landfill.

In short, everyone benefits from recycling – even those who don't recycle. It is only fair to ask everyone to share in the cost of providing a benefit that everyone will enjoy.

6) Can I Still Recycle At My Local Church/School?

Yes! Not only can you still recycle at your local school or church, but Saint Louis County encourages you to do so. The Saint Louis County Department of Health has worked with many schools and churches to set up these programs and it remains as supportive as ever of such efforts.

However, there are now a number of items that can be recycled curbside that cannot be recycled at any of the churches or schools. It is these additional items that Saint Louis County hopes you choose to recycle from home – even if you continue to take some items to a church or school.

7) Why Can't I Just Recycle At A Recycling Center?

Residents can still choose to take some items to a recycling center. However, not all items that can be recycled curbside can be recycled at either of the two recycling centers in the county. In addition, if every county resident were to drive to a recycling center every week, it would require a lot more fuel than will be used by a recycling collection vehicle that collects recyclables from your curbside.

Studies have shown that while recycling centers can play an important role in rural areas where residences are generally far apart, urban areas are best served by curbside recycling. It is easier and more cost-effective, more residents participate, and in the end, more items are recycled.

8) I Live In A Municipality/Subdivision With An Existing Trash Hauling Contract. How Will We Be Affected?

The waste code has an allowance for existing trash hauling contracts. Any trash contract that was in effect and operational on or before January 1st, 2008, may continue for the duration of the contract without the new basic trash service requirements being implemented. However, any new contracts after that (or contract extensions) must comply with the new basic trash service rules.

9) When Can I Start To Recycle?

The start of curbside recycling service will depend on your trash hauler. Different haulers will begin offering the service at different times, however, most haulers have committed to providing curbside recycling on or before April 1st, 2008. Please contact your individual hauler for more details.

10) How Much Is Recycling Going To Cost Me?

Recycling is now a part of basic trash service in Saint Louis County, so the cost of curbside recycling will be included in your trash bill. It is probably not possible to calculate exactly what portion of your bill can be attributed to recycling because there are a number of other factors currently affecting rates such as rising fuel prices and potential savings associated with including recycling in everyone's basic service. Please contact your individual hauler for details about rates for basic trash service.

11) Do I Have To Pay For Recycling Service If I Return My Recycling Cart?

Returning the recycling cart will not lower your trash bill because recycling is now a part of basic trash service in Saint Louis County. In order to encourage more people to recycle and to make residents aware of the new basic trash service rules, the County Health Department decided to provide recycling carts free of charge to all residents of unincorporated Saint Louis County. However, this decision by the Health Department had no effect on the implementation of the new basic trash service rules – they would have gone into effect either way.

12) My Subdivision Opted Out ... Why Did I Get A Recycling Cart?

Opting out of the trash districting program did not exempt a subdivision from the new basic trash service rules.

There are two separate changes to the waste code being implemented at the same time: The first is a program to divide the unincorporated portions of Saint Louis County into eight (8) trash districts and then open those eight (8) districts to bids from private haulers for district-wide trash collection service. The second is the implementation of a county ordinance defining basic trash service throughout Saint Louis County as having three components: 1) weekly trash collection; 2) weekly recycling collection; and, 3) twice-yearly bulky pickup.

If you live in a subdivision that has opted out, then you will not be a part of the trash districting program. However, all haulers throughout the county are still required to comply with the new basic service provisions of the ordinance. Therefore, whether you live in a municipality or in unincorporated Saint Louis County, weekly recycling collection will be a part of your basic trash service – even if you live in a subdivision that has opted out of the trash districting plan.

13) Who Is Responsible For The Recycling Cart?

The recycling cart is the property of the Saint Louis County Department of Health, but it has been placed in your care for your use. If you decide you don't want it, then we will pick it back up from your residence. If you decide to keep it, then it will be your responsibility to make sure it is used properly and not damaged by misuse.

If you move, be aware that the cart is assigned to the residence – please leave it behind for whoever moves in next.

14) If My Recycling Cart Needs To Be Serviced, Whom Do I Call?

The recycling cart comes with a one-year parts-and-labor warranty for any damages that occur during shipping and for any defective materials and parts. Damage caused by misuse is not covered by the warranty. If you have a problem you believe is covered by the warranty, please contact the Department of Health by calling (314) 615-8958 so that a repair or replacement can be scheduled.

15) When Will My Recycling Cart Be Picked Up If I Don't Want It?

Unwanted recycling carts will be picked back up as soon as possible after the initial deliveries have been completed. However, pickups in a particular trash district will not begin until enough time has passed for everyone to either return a postcard or contact the Health Department to request a pickup.

The original estimate was that pickups would start between four (4) and six (6) weeks after the initial deliveries, but that will be dependent on a number of factors such as the number of people requesting pickups, the weather, and daily traffic conditions.

Postcards will be sent out to each trash district letting residents know when they need to set unwanted recycling carts out for pickup.

16) How am I supposed to afford the new basic trash service?

The long-term benefits of the program – including lower costs in the long run – are thought to outweigh any initial downsides. In addition, the trash districting program is expected to bring down trash hauling rates. In the one district for which a single hauler has already been selected (Trash District #3), Veolia (the winning bidder) will only be charging \$11.60 a month for basic trash service during the first year of the contract – a rate lower than some were paying previously just for weekly trash collection. In addition, senior citizens (those older than 65) will also receive a 10% across-the-board discount on their bill.

The other seven (7) trash districts are undergoing the competitive bidding process in May. While the county cannot guarantee rates as low as in Trash District #3, we remain optimistic that the bids will at least be in the same ball park. A 10% senior citizen discount is a mandatory requirement for all submitted bids.

Some haulers may also be offering reduced rates for people who meet certain criteria. Please contact your individual hauler for more information about possible rate reductions.

17) Who Else Can I Talk To About This Program?

You can submit any additional questions or comments you have to waste.doh@stlouisco.com and we will do our best to respond. You can also contact your individual hauler for more information, or you can call Saint Louis County at (314) 615-HAUL (4285).