

INNOVATIONS IN TRASH PICKUP

Garbage trucks' fuel use leads to savings push

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DELAWARE, Ohio -- Residents can help the city save money by taking out the trash.

That's if they're willing to drag trash and recycling bins to the curb only when full, or to cluster bins in a common area with neighbors.

Higher diesel prices are driving up the cost of weekly refuse collections, so city officials in the Delaware County seat are trying new ways to reduce fuel use.

One cost-saving idea is to consolidate the number of stops made by a fleet of garbage trucks powered by traditional diesel engines.

"If we could get residents to come halfway, and put two trash cans in the middle of each house, then the number of stops would be cut in half," said Delaware Councilman Jim Moore, who serves on the city's public-works committee.

A garbage truck averages about 650 stops a day. In a week, trucks stop 10,391 times, collectively.

"Where you lose your fuel efficiency on these large trucks is when you try to take them from a standstill, and then start," Moore said. "It takes a tremendous amount of fuel to get those heavy trucks moving."

The city explained how residents can help in a printed message that appeared on utility bills sent to about 13,000 households this month.

Officials say that in the first half of 2007, 16,035 gallons of fuel was used to make weekly collections for refuse and recycling. In the same period this year, the city used 16,867 gallons because the service area was larger.

Other trash haulers are exploring creative ways to save.

Columbus uses automated garbage trucks with mechanical arms to empty trash bins, which has reduced costs because the city doesn't need as many drivers, said Mary Carran Webster, assistant director of public service.

In the past, the city has weighed suggestions to streamline collection by having residents line bins along only one side of the street.

"That could save on fuel, but there's a risk factor involved," Webster said. "How do you tell someone on Henderson Road to dodge traffic? So we kind of rejected that."

Columbus uses biodiesel fuel in all its garbage trucks, which can be costlier but is gentler on the environment.

Rumpke Consolidated Cos. schedules its collections during low-traffic times, said spokesman Jonathan Kissell. "We can do the routes much quicker and won't be sitting in traffic a long time," he said.

The Cincinnati-based company has contracts with many central Ohio suburbs, including Bexley, Dublin, Gahanna, New Albany, Powell, Reynoldsburg, Westerville, Whitehall and Worthington.

Rumpke is investing in new automated trucks that cut down on service time. It also relies on a computer program to map out the most-productive routes for drivers.

In Lancaster, sanitation supervisors are reworking routes to maximize efficiency. They're also asking drivers to limit engine idling, said Paul Martin, superintendent of the Lancaster Sanitation Department.

"Our fuel is 3 to 6 miles per gallon on a truck," Martin said. "It's pretty bad."

He has read in trade magazines about pioneering cities such as New York that are experimenting with natural gas-powered garbage trucks.

"That, I think, is the biggest way that we're going to be able to save money," Martin said.

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