

WM, Harford County School District Project Changing Behaviors and Producing Unseen Benefits

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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Organics pilot program brainchild of Resource Conservation Manager Andrew Cassilly

Bel Air, Md., Sept. 16, 2013 - Nearly a year ago, Andrew Cassilly, resource conservation manager for Harford County Public Schools (HCPS), began thinking of additional ways to enhance the District's efforts to reduce its carbon footprint and continue to lead by example as an environmental steward.

Cassilly soon determined organics composting was a natural fit yet wasn't quite sure how to structure and implement a comprehensive program. For that, he turned to Bob Beckwith, WM's Sr Education Solutions Representative, with whom he had struck an initial partnership on a single-stream recycling program that delivered \$75,000 in savings to HCPS.

The two, along with other representatives from both organizations, met in September 2012 to hash out details and put together the framework for the pilot program. Cassilly knew he wanted to develop a large-scale composting program, and it was soon determined it needed to be commercial, as opposed to residential, due to the sheer volume the district will eventually deliver.

"Andrew is truly one of our visionary customers and partners," said Byron Chafin, Director of Education Sales-Northern Tier at Waste Management. "As an environmental solutions provider, we get excited when our customers come to us with innovative projects and fortunately we had the technology and infrastructure in place to turn his idea into a tangible program in a short period of time."

After determining the schools that would participate, other components of the programs, such as choosing the right size containers, level of training required, signage, and administrative contract issues, were agreed upon and put into place.

The pilot program was rolled out at the beginning of February, coincidentally the day after the hometown Ravens won the Super Bowl. The smooth transition was

assisted by both parties having representatives on site for the kickoff and the school system provided extra volunteers to assist the students.

The pilot program currently consists of six schools, four elementary, a junior and senior high school. Future plans call for a sequential rollout - from the original six to 12, then 24, and eventually, to encompass all 54 schools in the district. The school system anticipates the program to increase to 12 schools in the current 2013-14 school year.

Cassilly is genuinely pleased with how the program has taken hold at the pilot schools and is even more impressed with how quickly the kids were able to adapt to the new approaches. The students have even produced two educational videos about the program.

“For the elementary kids, one day is all it takes,” Cassilly said. “High school is a bit more challenging. We need to get them to rethink more established behaviors, which requires added signage and education. For the adults - teachers and custodians - it’s an even bigger shift.”

Another key outcome of the initiative was figuring out where the most waste comes from. The average school is producing 400 lbs. of compost per week.

“Elementary kids are by far the biggest contributors to the scrap pile,” Cassilly said. “High school kids eat everything ... or share everything. Most of the food waste in high school comes from the kitchen.”

Since implementing the organics program, HCPS has seen benefits in many areas, both expected and unexpected. Its single stream recycling program experienced a significant lift in participation from students and staff. Custodial clean up time was greatly reduced and in most cases the trash collection was reduced, cutting collection costs. In addition, separating the wet organic waste has lightened the load of heavy trash bags custodians must routinely transport and hoist into dumpsters.

“This should help reduce accident and injury cases for our system,” says Cassilly.

Lastly, this process has allowed HCPS to serve as a teaching tool for teachers in supporting the concepts taught in the curriculum.

Whereas the recycling program was instituted for operational savings, the composting pilot program is simply working to achieve cost-neutrality. Recently, the school system closed one loop on this sustainable program by returning several large truckloads of the compostable material for use on its athletic fields.

“The material is an excellent soil amendment making our fields greener and safer for our athletes. I am confident it will also greatly reduce the need for fertilizer,” said Cassilly.

ABOUT WASTE MANAGEMENT

Waste Management, which is based in Houston, Texas, is North America's leading provider of comprehensive waste management and recycling services. Through its subsidiaries, the company provides collection, transfer, recycling and resource recovery, and disposal services. Waste Management is a leading developer, operator and owner of waste-to-energy and landfill gas-to-energy facilities in the United States. The company's customers include residential, commercial, industrial, and municipal customers throughout North America. To learn more information about Waste Management, visit www.wm.com.

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