



7/20/2015

Letters to the Editor  
The Washington Post  
1150 15th Street NW  
Washington DC 20071

Dear Editor,

The Washington Post's recent article profiling recycling's struggle to manage costs during a down market while also reducing contamination, has wrongly placed the blame on the blue roll cart and the communities who use them. The blue recycling cart can be immensely helpful in helping communities gain efficiencies. Recycling in any community requires ongoing work to increase not just the *quantity* of material that is recycled, but also the *quality* of material.

Recycling is a valued and valuable public service, it would, however, be a bold misconception to consider it a "profit center" for cities and counties. It is a cost, not at all unlike the collection and disposal of trash, and the services of clean drinking water, or reliable sewer systems.

What differs about recycling is that it is also the start of a supply chain— recycling produces a supply of materials to make tomorrow's consumer goods. The national demand for recycled-content manufacturing feedstock continues to expand, leaving the recycling industry working hard to meet that out-paced demand. In a 2010 study, the Southeast Recycling Development Council determined that over 200 key Southeastern manufacturers look to recycled feedstock to develop new consumer goods. When communities invest in local recycling collection programs, they're supporting regional manufacturers who depend on recycled plastic, glass, metal, and paper to make new consumer goods. These manufacturers collectively support more than 47,525 employees and see a sales volume towering more than \$29.4 billion. So, recycling service is more than a cost, it is a solid investment.

Demand for recycled cans, bottles, and paper is higher than ever before. More recovered material means a reliable flow into the diversified, robust industry. When communities transition to cart-based recycling in an effort to increase their recycling rates, they see many positive outcomes including:

- **Cost savings:** Local governments are able to save money in collection costs through the automation that comes along with the use of recycling roll carts. When Orange County, North Carolina converted to single stream cart-based collection, their collection costs were reduced from roughly \$4/Household/month to closer to \$3.35/household/month, equaling almost \$200,000 in savings annually.
- **Improved employee safety:** Communities that replace manual collection with a more automated cart-based collection dramatically preserve their most important asset: their staff members. Automated collection is safer and decreases workers' compensation claims. Minneapolis, Minnesota reduced workers' compensation claims by \$250,000 within the first year of transitioning to carts.
- **Ease of use improves participation rates:** Without ease of use, participation is limited. It is projected that Recycling Partnership community Columbia, SC will experience a 500% increase in their recycling rates due in large part to the increased size of the recycling receptacle. That increased participation rate also affords more operational efficiencies for the City.

- **Less in the landfill means more savings:** Increasing recycling, decreases garbage, thus local governments realize more savings in garbage collection and landfill tip fees. While collection costs vary from one community to the next, the collection cost for either trash or recycling often exceeds \$100/ton. For example, in 2014, Cary, NC reported a cost \$137/ton for the collection and transport of solid waste, \$122/ton for the collection and transport of recyclables. And places like Scarborough, Maine recently reported the town has saved \$1.5 million in reduced garbage disposal fees since transitioning to cart-based recycling collection nine years ago.

Recycling is a deeply rooted aspect, not just of our American ethos, but also our American manufacturing base. It is well documented that recycling results in reduced greenhouse gas emissions, conservation of natural resources, reduced air & water pollution and conserved energy. Recycling Partnership community Richmond, VA recently made program improvements that will result in 10-year savings of more than 300,000,000 gallons of water and 143,000 metric tons of CO2. That's equivalent to taking 30,000 cars off the road. These are huge environmental benefits that are important to the health and welfare of the American public.

Recycling is much more than an environmental action. Unlike the waste management industry, recycling adds value to materials, contributing to a growing labor force including materials sorters, dispatchers, truck drivers, brokers, sales representatives, process engineers, and chemists. These jobs also generally pay above the average national wage, and many are in inner city urban areas where job creation is vital. In a recent report, South Carolina highlighted an estimated \$6.5 billion total economic impact to the state's economy from recycling. Similarly, Pennsylvania reports 3,803 recycling and reuse establishments supporting more than 52,000 jobs, \$20.6 billion in sales and \$2.2 billion in annual payroll.

As an industry, recycling is more complex than it'd seem at first glance: lots of players from public to private, narrow margins that get squeezed when market prices fall, a changing world of packaging types. But it's also a deeply rooted, nimble, and active industry, one that delivers big returns for the environment, for industry, for communities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Keefe Harrison', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Keefe Harrison, Executive Director