



# MEMO

Pinellas County Utilities  
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**TO: Bob Brumback, Chairman and  
Members of the Technical Management Committee**

**FROM: Robert Hauser, Jr., Director** *Robert Hauser, Jr.*  
**Utilities Solid Waste Operations**

**SUBJ: Response to the City of St. Petersburg**  
**RE: Curbside Recycling**

**DATE: June 25, 2008**

This memorandum is being written in response to the memorandum and supporting documentation submitted to the TMC by Mr. Michael J. Connors, Internal Services Administrator for the City of St. Petersburg, dated February 26, 2008. In particular, it focuses upon the list of bullet items entitled "Waste Recycling, Why not City-Wide Curbside Recycling", as well as attached information.

The focus of this response is directed towards residential curbside recycling programs. Residential recycling programs generally target newspaper, cardboard, other recyclable paper, plastic bottles, aluminum and steel cans, and glass bottles. These are materials typically found in residential waste. The document provides an estimate of about 11% for this material in the total waste stream. Although this figure is generally correct, these materials represent over 30%, by weight, of the residential waste stream that is currently disposed at the County's facility (based upon our 2007 waste composition study). It should be noted that the County's facility only receives about 60-65% of the total waste with the remainder comprising construction and demolition waste and yard waste recycled and/or disposed at other facilities as well as other recycled materials. Other programs are in place to target recyclables in the commercial, industrial and construction sectors, but curbside recycling is the most effective mechanism to recover recyclables from the residential waste stream.

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Curbside recycling programs in Pinellas County and elsewhere around the state are recovering on average 250 to 500 pounds per household per year. In comparison, Pinellas County recovered 1,870 tons of recyclables at its drop-off centers and St. Petersburg recovered 1,342 tons of recyclables (fiber and containers) in 2007 at its 22 drop-offs. These recovery rates amount to about 40 pounds per household per year.

With respect to the County's landfill life, we estimate that curbside recycling programs in those areas not already providing such service would reduce landfill requirements by about 6-7% annually at the current time. This is likely to increase to well over 10% in the future with the growth of waste deliveries in the future. Given our estimated remaining landfill life of 70 years, curbside recycling would extend the landfill life by over 6-8 years. St. Petersburg's contributions to this life extension would be about 2-3 years. Curbside recycling is an important part of our overall program to minimize the landfilling of waste and preserving the County's landfill.

The city recycles almost 22,000 tons of construction and demolition (C&D) waste. The City has a good program for this type of material. Countywide, about 230,000 tons, out of about 460,000 tons of C&D waste generated, were recycled. Most of this was recycled by private firms with the remainder disposed of out-of-county in C&D disposal facilities. The County's landfill receives very little of this type of material. Most importantly, however, with respect to curbside recycling, this type of material is not targeted or included in such programs.

The City also has a very good yard waste mulching program. But again, such material is not typically included in curbside recycling programs.

The report also says there are 130 private facilities in the city where residents can drop off recyclable materials. However, the City's website specifically says they are intended for use only by the organization sponsoring the location. Furthermore, the 259 locations where the City provides cardboard collection are located at businesses. None of these sites are available to the public. It is a nice benefit for the City to provide commercial cardboard recycling to local business, but again, this material is generally not considered when evaluating residential curbside recycling.

The report cites that the City recycles more than 930 pounds per capita per year or 75% higher than the national average. Based upon information furnished by the City, we can find no basis for this number. Using the EPA methodology (which excludes C&D waste and some other recycled waste included by the City), the City's recycling rate is estimated at about 455 pounds per capita per year or 15% below the national recycling rate reported by EPA. The information provided by the City in the report often compares numbers derived from different sources and methodologies which are not directly comparable. Overall, the City's recycling rate can be characterized as average, at best.

The report refers to the high cost of curbside recycling. Curbside recycling programs typically cost \$2.00-\$3.00 per household per month, excluding revenues derived from the sale of the recovered materials. Such a program would reduce the costs to the City associated with the drop-off centers which could be applied to curbside recycling. The City's solid waste fee includes costs for operation of the drop-off locations. The City's solid waste fee for collection and disposal is higher than 18 other municipalities in Pinellas County, all but two of which have curbside collection and twice per week garbage collection included in their fees. Also, if the City were to increase recycling by only 100 pounds per household per year (still well below the average of such programs), it would save over \$135,000 per year in disposal fees at the county's disposal facility. Finally, the report includes information on the City's estimated cost to conduct a curbside program. The estimates of the number of vehicles and personnel required as well as the associated ancillary costs appear high compared to the requirements of similar programs.

The information provided by Mr. Connors references a survey of the public with some summary numbers. The basis of the survey and how it was presented to the public is unknown. Also, an RFP for curbside collection was issued by the city which received no responses. However, the terms and conditions of this document were such that no private company could reasonably be expected to bid a responsible cost.

The article implies that curbside recycling is not good for the environment. However, the article neglects to mention any of the advantages or offsets associated with a curbside recycling program such as the cost of fuel used by residents to drive to drop-off locations or the fuel utilized by the trucks servicing the drop-off locations. But most importantly, to appreciate the environmental benefits of curbside recycling, a life cycle analysis is required comparing the cost to collect, transport and manufacture new products from recyclables against the energy and resources it takes to extract, process, transport and manufacture those products from virgin material. A number of models have been developed to perform this comparison including the Environmental Benefits Calculator (EBC), developed by the Northeast Recycling Coalition and the EPA Waste Reduction Model (WARM). These models, as well as many other studies and investigations all demonstrate that overall, curbside recycling programs reduce Green House Gas emissions and conserve energy.

Curbside collection has a positive overall impact upon the environment. While it is true that most curbside recycling programs do not make money and have associated costs not directly recovered by the collection/processing/sale of material, the environmental benefits and other associated benefits should certainly be included in the evaluation of curbside recycling. Most cities and urban counties in Florida, as well as nationally, have curbside collection programs. Of the 10 largest counties in Florida, all but Pinellas County have a comprehensive curbside recycling program, and the largest cities in Florida (which includes all cities with populations greater than 61,000), all have curbside recycling except St. Petersburg. The large majority of residents in the County and in St. Petersburg

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are in favor of curbside recycling. It is the County's goal to act in an environmentally responsible manner and achieve the environmental benefits associated with curbside recycling.

RH/jl

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cc: Tom Crandall, Interim Utilities Director