

Case Study

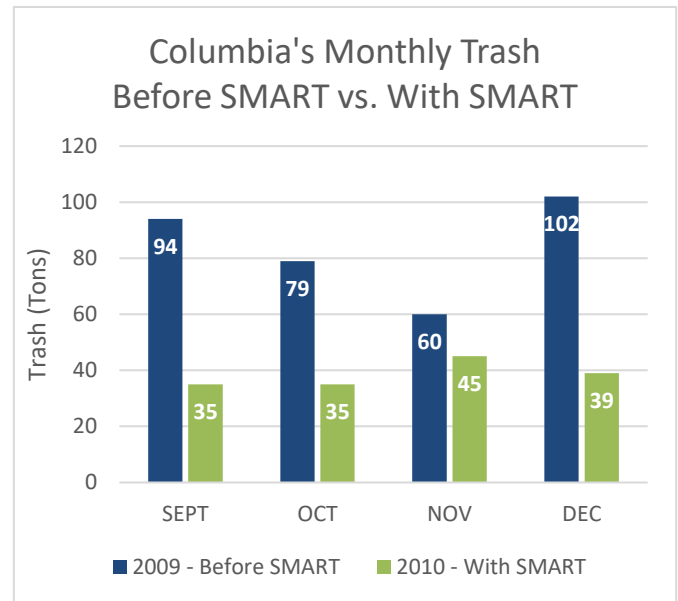
Columbia's SMART Trial

"The data associated with the Columbia Pay-As-You-Throw (PAYT) trial program indicated to me that PAYT has two benefits. First, it helps educate people about the cost of trash. Second, it encourages recycling." – Jonathan Luiz, Former Town Administrator

Background

Save Money and Reduce Trash (SMART) Programs aim to encourage waste reduction using financial incentives. Columbia's SMART trial ran for 6-months and covered household waste utilizing town-issued bags priced by volume.

Population:	5,492
Households Served:	2,081
Services Provided:	Residential drop-off at town Transfer Station
Program Duration:	September 2010 – February 2011



Highlights

- Columbia's 6-month trial achieved a reduction in waste by 54%.
- The town's recycling rate increased from 31% to 41% during the trial.

Smart Program Description

- Program Start Date: September 2010- February 2011
- Population: 5,492
- Households Served: 2,081
- Bag Prices:
 - \$0.53 for 8 gallon bag
 - \$1.00 for 14 gallon bag
 - \$2.00 for 33 gallon bag
- Bags were supplied by Waste Zero and sold at four local retail locations
- Local transfer station only accepted trash that was put in official SMART program bags

Why SMART?

- The town Board of Selectmen (BOS) charged the Solid Waste Recycling Advisory Committee (SWRAC) to examine a SMART program, from a financial and environmental perspective. After weeks of discussion, the BOS held a town meeting and ultimately decided to implement a 6-month trial. The revenue generated from bag sales were used to defray the costs of solid waste disposal (tipping fees).

- The goal of the program was to reduce waste, improve recycling and achieve greater equity by charging those who dispose of large amounts of trash more than those disposing of less.

Program Results

- Municipal solid waste decreased by 54%
- Hauling costs and tipping fees reduced by 56%
- Bag revenue exceeded expectations:
 - \$25,000 was budgeted for the entire 6 month trial and, only 4 months into the trial, net bag revenues exceeded this number at \$28,000
- Recycling rate increased from 31% to 41%

Why Was the Program Eliminated?

- Despite the SWRAC recommendations residents of Columbia voted to discontinue the SMART program at a town meeting in February 2011. Many of the residents who opposed the program attended the meeting, leaving those in favor of the program underrepresented.
- Citizens felt they were paying “double taxation” between their property tax and newly town-issued bag costs, not realizing that their property taxes for trash disposal were now being allocated on other community services.
- Columbia’s Final Perspective: Towns should practice transparent accounting for solid waste by having users incur direct costs for services as opposed to burying costs in the property tax.

Suggestions for the Future

- Educate all selectmen individually prior to public outreach so that they understand the merits and myths of SMART.
- Visit similar communities with SMART programs to see the program in action and to be witness to the merits and myths of the program.
- Pilot SMART for at least one year to eighteen months to give time for residents to get used to the program.
- Avoid public meeting and vote if at all possible and let the elected officials make the decision to handle solid waste as a utility.

Contact

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