

Commercial recycling, composting programs lag residential efforts

While the awareness and implementation of the most complete recycling and composting programs has penetrated the homes and lifestyles of many Americans, it is quite a different story when it comes to our recycling behaviors in the commercial office world.



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Despite successes of our residential recycling programs, as a society, the majority of our waste continues to be produced from nonresidential sources – commercial office buildings.

Efforts within our homes have proven to be critically important to reducing waste to landfills and increasing use of recyclables. However, opportunities in our commercial environment may be the most critical next step in truly moving our communities, residential and commercial, to zero impact to landfills.

A strong commitment and cooperation from partners, including commercial tenants, building management, janitorial staff and the recycling experts in a community, are the primary elements to the success of commercial recycling and compost-

Landfill airspace saved (cu yd)	24
Number of mature trees saved	107
Gallons of oil saved	2,786
Gallons of gasoline saved	151
Gallons of water saved	41,115
Kw-hr of electricity saved	24,978
Source: Alpine Recycling and the EPA	

Landfill airspace saved (cu yd)	22
Number of mature trees saved	101
Gallons of oil saved	2,736
Gallons of gasoline saved	143
Gallons of water saved	40,968
Kw-hr of electricity saved	24,834
Source: Alpine Recycling and the EPA	

ing. The recent announcement of just such a partnership in our Denver community is producing stunning results within the first several weeks of its implementation. In April of this year, the Gates Corp. world headquarters building in Lower Downtown Denver became the first commercial office building in the area to implement a comprehensive recycling and composting program.

This progressive and innovative new recycling program is a collaborative effort between Gates Corp., its recycling contractor, Denver-based Altogether Recycling™, a division of Alpine Waste & Recycling, janitorial service provider Rocky Mountain Janitorial Specialists and building management partner The Jones Realty Group.

Home to more than 400 employees who produce an average 9.29 tons of waste per month, the early returns on this program are creating a scenario in which 88 percent of waste materials leaving the building are composted or recycled.

■ **May 2008 Gates waste recycling and composting summary:** 9.29 tons of waste produced; 8.13 tons recycled/composted; and 87.5 percent reduction of waste to landfill.

■ **June 2008 Gates waste recycling and composting summary:** 9.29 tons of waste; 8.22 tons recycled/composted; and 88.5 percent reduction of waste to landfill.

While Gates has been an active recycler for years, the new Altogether Recycling program

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changes the way the company recycles on site and the handling of food waste that leaves the property.

A primary difference from the previous recycling procedures is that there is no need for separation of recycling materials. Paper, cardboard, glass, plastic and aluminum (all recyclable materials) are collected together in the same bin. Six months' worth of planning and education between the building management team, Gates employees, the janitorial crew and the recycler helped lead to the development of necessary signage, containers and systems to ease the Altogether Recycling/compost implementation process.

The separation process takes

place between the recyclable materials and the biodegradable waste. For example: A partially eaten food product goes into a compost collection bin, while the recyclable plate it was served on goes into the recycle bin.

Compost bins in each break room, as well as the employee cafeteria, create easy access and collection. The janitorial contractor monitors and maintains the collection bins and removes them as needed throughout the day and at night. Once a week, a six-yard compost receptacle, located on the loading dock, is picked up and taken to a local composting site.

By incorporating composting into its environmental program, Gates is moving toward achieving its goal of contributing less than 5 percent waste to land-

fill and helping reduce its carbon footprint even more than it already has through previous efforts.

The early results are more than piquing the interest of building owners and managers, businesses of all sizes, recyclers and numerous other environmental and government organizations. Off-the-chart percentages of occupant recycling are helping to demonstrate the success of this innovative approach in the LEED-EB certification process.

The recycling and composting systems we use in our homes are working, we simply need to expand those systems in our workplaces in order to truly make the impact, or lack of impact in this case, to landfills that we hope to achieve.▲