

Q & A'S

Questions and Answers: Recycling & Trash Options in Fort Collins

Updated 7.21.2009

Welcome to the City's list of **Frequently Asked Questions** about recent changes to the community's curbside recycling program and pay-as-you-throw trash rates. We'll update these Q&A's on an ongoing basis based on your inquiries. Thanks for your interest!

Question 1: Why does my trash bill look different than it used to?

Answer: City Council recently adopted changes to the "pay-as-you-throw" trash ordinance. The amended ordinance prohibits any charges, such as base rates, fuel surcharges or environmental fees, from being shown on trash bills. The only charge that can appear on your bill is the actual unit cost of garbage (per 32-gallon container).

Fort Collins' Municipal Code¹ changes have eliminated the use of base rates; it does not require an increase in rates. In fact, the Code only requires a restructuring of rates. If residents take the opportunity to downsize their trash, they may actually save money.

Question 2: I'm concerned about the increase on my trash bill; what is it attributed to?

Answer: In the local open competitive market for trash collection, the City of Fort Collins does not determine trash rates; they are set by your hauler. In the past, haulers used to cover some of their costs of service by applying a monthly "base rate". Now, the only fee that can show on your trash bill is the actual unit cost of garbage (curbside recycling is provided to residential customers at no additional fee, as required by City ordinance).

Haulers set their rates taking into account their costs of doing business. Most of the costs of trash and recycling collection are in the delivery of service (trucks and fuel for both recycling and trash vehicles, labor and billing, etc.). The hauler sets a rate for the first can of trash that works for their business, and each additional unit costs the same amount (e.g., 32 gallons = 1x, 64 gallons = 2x, 96 gallons = 3x) Haulers also usually charge based on the subscription rate you choose, not the actual amount of trash in the container.

As haulers look at their costs of doing business, they set their rates based on the formula set out by the City.

¹ Download the amended ordinance at <http://www.fcgov.com/recycling>

Question 3: How do I reduce my trash bill?

Answer: If you find that your trash bill is higher than it used to be, now might be the time to look at the size of your service subscription. Some people find that they rarely fill up their current trash container and can get by with a smaller size. If you're ready to down-size your trash container (say, from 96-gallons per week to 64-gallons, or from 64-gallons to 32-gallons per week), give your trash hauler a call to change your subscription level. That will help cut your costs.

If you aren't already a recycler, make sure to order a curbside recycling bin from your trash hauler and start down the "Reduce, Reuse, Recycle" path. If your small curbside recycling box is always overflowing – good news! – your hauler will now begin to offer larger carts (64-gallon or 96-gallon capacity) upon request.

Question 4: How do I get hold of my trash hauler?

Answer: Here are the contact numbers for trash haulers in Fort Collins:

- Gallegos Sanitation, Inc. (970-484-5556) or www.gallegossanitation.com
- Ram Waste Systems, Inc. (970-226-3396)
- Waste Management (970-482-6319, or 866-482-6319)

Question 5: I'm still confused – how does trash billing work?

Answer: For residential customers, trash billing is done in advance, on a quarterly basis (as opposed to commercial trash accounts, which are generally billed every month). September 1, 2009 is the effective date for the "pure" pay-as-you-throw rates; your bill for the third quarter of 2009 will reflect restructured rates.

When you call a private carrier to start trash service, they typically sign you up for a subscription for a 1-can, 2-cans, or 3-cans level of trash removal per week, plus curbside recycling. (Extra bags of trash you may need to set out will show up on the next billing cycle as extra charges, or "overages".) At any time, customers in Fort Collins are entitled to change their subscription level, which would then become effective on the next billing cycle.

Question 6: There seems to be a lot of commotion about changes to Fort Collins' trash system. Why does the City care how haulers set their rates?

Answer: Fort Collins took a pay-as-you-throw (PAYT) approach in 1996, based on the strong recommendation of the Environmental Protection Agency for communities around the country. EPA found that when everyone is charged based on the volume of trash they generate, it is more equitable to everyone, and furthermore, creates participation in recycling and waste diversion efforts. On average, communities measure 6% more waste diversion when they adopt PAYT trash rates.

It has been clearly documented that once customers make the connection between “the less you throw away, the more you save”, they can – and do – realize savings on household finances. The customer wins as they save money and the environment wins as recycling rates increase.

Since adopting a goal in 1999 to divert 50% of the community’s waste stream from landfill disposal, the City Council has continued to hone the PAYT system to clearly send an economic savings message, and reinforce recycling, composting and waste reduction habits.

Question 7: When can I expect to have delivery of a bigger recycling cart?

Answer: Some of the local trash haulers are already taking orders and will begin delivering new recycling carts in the next few months. Their deadline for meeting this requirement is January 1, 2010. Depending on which company you use, you may be asked to pay a refundable deposit fee for the use of the new carts.

As soon as haulers have rolled out new, larger carts, the ordinance will allow them to switch to collecting recyclables on alternate weeks, which will reduce truck traffic in neighborhoods and in the process, lower the haulers’ collection costs. Trash will still be a weekly service. Your hauler will provide you with the recycling schedule for your area. Regardless of which week they collect your recycling, it will continue to be collected on the same day of the week as trash is collected.

Question 8: What if I don’t want to downsize my trash bin?

Answer: No problem - it is completely your decision as to what size trash container to use.

Question 9: How well will these changes work?

Answer: All around the country, different communities have different ways of running their trash and recycling programs. Pay-as-you-throw is working as intended in Fort Collins, where our 2008 waste diversion rate grew to 33% (compared to 27% in 2007). After the new changes have been in effect for six months or a year, we’ll have a better idea of how well the more transparent trash rates are working, and whether they have helped people decide to down-size their trash cans.

Other places that have already rolled out larger recycling carts have documented as much as a 20% increase in recycling volumes. The City collects data that will help us see what kind of shift occurs in 2010 as a result of the requirement for haulers to provide larger recycling carts to their Fort Collins residents.

Question 10: What else can I do to recycle more or compost?

Answer: Keep posted on what can be recycled because every year or so, more products are being collected in the curbside program. For instance, did you know you can recycle cardboard and paperboard (thin cardboard such as cereal boxes) now if you prepare them properly so they fit in the container? Same goes for plastics – many of the containers labeled plastics #1 through #7 are now accepted. For the complete list, go to http://www.fcgov.com/recycling/pdf/curbside_recycling_guide_2008-0711.pdf.

Other thoughts:

- Work on consuming fewer goods and products in the first place, which helps create less trash.
- Buy in bulk to reduce packaging.
- Yard waste going to the landfill is one of the biggest avoidable sources of trash. You have options:
 - Consider taking up back-yard composting;
 - Check into the commercial services of local composting companies-- Gallegos Sanitation offers curbside yardwaste recycling, for a fee, to residential customers or visit Hageman's EarthCycle, a commercially operated yardwaste drop-off site at 3501 E. Prospect (for a fee).