

Establishing a Corporate Baseline for Recycling and Monitoring Progress

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As part of Amtrak's Environmental Policy (and the recently enacted Sustainability Policy), the company recycles both industrial type waste and municipal type waste. While industrial waste was easy to track through Amtrak's Procurement and Materials Management group, individual departments across the system controlled their municipal waste disposal at the field level. This made it extremely difficult to measure system-wide progress with municipal waste streams. Many different vendors were used across the company, each supplying varied levels of recycling data, and some sites lacked a contract for recycling services entirely.

To begin the process of centralizing data to better manage these waste streams, Amtrak contracted with a national firm in August 2012 to manage, report, and optimize all waste accounts for municipal materials. These data management services are the same that have been used since 2007 to manage Amtrak's other utility accounts (e.g. electricity, natural gas and steam). The goal was to centralize data collection and establish a reliable baseline for municipal solid waste amounts and recycling rates. Subsequently, this would allow Amtrak to set performance improvement targets and track waste diversion rates for our onboard recycling program and the recycling that occurs at our offices, stations, and maintenance facilities.

During the first year of the data centralization program (2013), a total of 101 waste accounts were entered into the waste management tracking system. These accounts cover all of Amtrak's largest owned and operated facilities. We estimate that these accounts comprise 85 to 90 percent of the municipal waste materials that our facilities generate. Once the data management firm receives Amtrak waste invoices, they are optically scanned, allowing information regarding vendors, pickup frequencies, container sizes and billing rates to be analyzed against contract terms.

This provides improved reporting for corporate metrics, and even allows sites to be notified if waste disposal increases or decreases significantly, allowing us to detect industrial materials that are being improperly managed at a site level, or identify when sites are not recycling on a consistent basis. Additional accounts will be added in future years, as we increase our understanding of our waste diversion rates at a national level. The first full year of data will be used to establish baseline metrics for municipal solid waste amounts with the goal of accounting for the amount disposed and the amount recycled.

In addition to creating a recycling baseline, this data is allowing us to right-size containers and service frequency to operate more sustainably and save the company money. Ultimately, Amtrak hopes to use this same model to implement organics recycling in the future, once more haulers begin offering those options.
