

Passaic County Cities Rewarded Grants for Recycling

By SARAH SCHILLACI, STAFF WRITER | 09/14/08

Passaic County municipalities are rewarded with state grants

New Jersey municipalities got their annual reminder last week that it pays to recycle.

The Recycling Tonnage Grant program, administered by the state Department of Environmental Protection, awards annual grants based on the amount of different materials that municipalities record as recycled.

In Clifton, the thanks were particularly large - of the \$8 million disbursed statewide, the city received \$137,670. Its grant is the third largest, after Newark and Jersey City.

"I was very happy when I saw the number," said Al DuBois, Clifton's recycling coordinator, who had worried that a loss of industry might negatively affect the amount of recyclables in the city. "I was very happy to see that we've been keeping as best we could a high tonnage reporting."

The grant program was launched in 1987 when state lawmakers instituted a tax of \$1.50 per ton on solid waste disposal. Money collected from the tax was then given to towns, which were required to use the funds to enhance their recycling programs.

After lapsing in 1997, the tax was reinstated in 2000. This January, Gov. Jon S. Corzine signed the Recycling Enhancement Act, which raised the tax to \$3 on each ton of garbage taken to a solid-waste disposal facility.

Besides Clifton, the biggest awardees in Passaic County were Paterson with \$99,031, Wayne with \$57,936, and Passaic with \$30,032.

Marie Kruzan, the executive director of the Association of New Jersey Recyclers, a nonprofit recycling advocacy group, said New Jersey's mandatory recycling program was fairly effective.

"Recycling is beginning to go back up in New Jersey," said Kruzan. "We are doing a better job of getting the businesses to recycle."

The recycling rate in Passaic County for 2006 was 32 percent - meaning that for every 100 tons of waste created, about 32 percent was recycled and 68 was garbage. The state average recycling rate is 35.9 percent.

"Passaic is clearly doing something," said Kruzan. "It could probably be better because it's a high population area."

Kruzan said that municipal recycling rates were often dependent on the economy. For example, recycled materials created from home construction would be likely to fall in the next year due to the slowing housing market.

Some Passaic County towns were rattled by the law, causing them to amp up their recycling programs. In Little Falls, the council enacted a plan with increased curbside pickup times and, for the first time, offered commingled recycling.

Councilman William Liess said the plan, which began on May 1, has had a positive effect on township recycling.

"I think it's very effective," said Liess. "Looking on my own street, (people) see the stuff put out, they put their own stuff out."

Liess said he expected the program to save Little Falls money, with the decrease in the waste processing tax outweighing the costs of collecting recyclables.

DuBois said the city's success in recycling was based on a number of factors.

"We've had a history in Clifton of being somewhat environmental," said DuBois. "We've done education, but only just about recycling. We've always including a broader base of environmental awareness."

DuBois also credited the city's industry and commercial enterprises, which added to the total recycling tonnage.

Still, DuBois pointed out that the Recycling Enhancement Act had initially been opposed by the city council because of its potential to hurt local industry.

"(The tax) is charging all our commercial accounts, the institutions, they're getting charged \$3 a ton as well," said DuBois. "Ultimately, they're paying, and they're struggling. It might really hurt them."

Despite his concerns, DuBois said he was pleased with the \$137,000 award.

"We can't complain with that," he said.

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