

2009 MRW Coordinators Meeting - Halting the Collection of Latex Paint (The King County Experience)

King County Solid Waste Division's MRW facilities are part of a larger collection of City and County agencies that make up the Local Hazardous Waste Management Program - a.k.a LHWMP. LHWMP is legally not authorized to fund the collection of a non-hazardous waste. Through testing, latex paint was determined to be non-hazardous.

Background

Money

- Latex paint was expensive to manage. In 2007, latex accounted for approximately half of the tonnage of MRW brought to our facilities. Solid Waste Division facilities spent approximately \$577,000 dollars managing latex at its facilities.
- In 2008, King County Solid Waste facilities and the LHWMP realized an overall 30-35% cost savings by not taking latex.

Message

- Communication plan was developed. The plan included talking to and working with the suburban cities, haulers, SWD staff and partner agencies to get the message out about the latex acceptance policy change.
- Tag line and message was "save a trip and dry it out". Advised residents to give away their usable paint and/or dry it out with kitty litter or paint hardener and put it out with their curbside garbage with the lid off.
- We asked the assistance of the suburban cities in King County to help us deliver the message. We developed text and a drop-in graphic ad for newsletters, brochures and other publications.
- Developed a hot pink colored "no latex paint" 1/3 sheet flyer that was distributed at paint stores, libraries and the Solid Waste Division transfer stations. The flyer notified residents of the effective date of the policy change, instructions on how to dry out the paint and message of using only what you need
- Web page updates on the LHWMP and Solid Waste Division web sites in advance of the policy change. SWD web site has a small streaming video clip with demonstration on drying out paint embedded in its latex paint disposal page.

Hauler Discussions

- Sent them letters and made phone calls
- Haulers main concern was making sure the paint was dried out. Informed them of our messaging efforts to residents. Were instructing residents to use kitty litter or paint hardener to dry out and emphasizing leaving the lid off.
- Had some historical information in that Pierce County stopped accepting latex paint a few years before us without problems.

Operation "Kitty Litter"

- Kitty litter give away at facilities along with "hot pink" flyer that had drying instructions.
- Gave on-site staff a stack of my cards so residents could contact me with complaints instead of the on-site staff.
- Felt it was important if we were going to send residents away with their latex that we could give them a little something.

The Experience

Overall, the change in the latex paint policy went pretty smooth.

Savings to the Program

In the first six months of 2008, the Program saved \$544,000 in disposal costs, much due to the latex paint policy change. Customer counts dropped approximately 40% at the two facilities from the same period in 2007 and there was a 64% reduction in tons of waste collected.

In 2008, I responded to **seven** complaints either by phone or e-mail and there were anecdotal statements I received from on-site staff about customer inconveniences. Early on in 2008, I also responded to a few calls from residents stating that the haulers were not taking their dried paint curbside. I had further conversations with Waste Management and Allied customer service staff that seemed to clear up confusion.

Getting the word out

The suburban cites did a great job notifying their residents via newsletters, websites and mailings promoting their recycling collection events. I did two large mailings of the hot pink "no latex paint flyers" to paint stores and King County libraries (one at the beginning of the year and again in the summer).

SWD's latex paint web page had nearly 12,000 page views from January through August 2008. July saw the largest viewing with just over 2000 page visits for the month. When users got to the page they were spending an average of two minutes viewing the information.

Summary

Because of our current economic environment, many agencies are looking at cost cutting measures. Managing latex is expensive and the cost savings associated with not doing it is really evident. The two biggest keys to our policy change going well were doing the ground work early in the process and the kitty litter give away.