United States Environmental Protection Agency
Solid Waste and Emergency Response (5305W)
EPA530-F-96-028
April 1997

Pay-As-You-Throw

Throw Away Less and Save

Pay As You Throw

You probably know how much you spend per month on your electricity and gas utilities. But do you know how much you spend on garbage?

Each time your city or town sends a truck down your street to pick up your trash, it costs money. It costs money even if you drop off your trash at a local dump. Ultimately, you pay for this service, usually through your local taxes. And it's not likely that you have much control over the amount you pay, regardless of how much garbage you create.

There is a different system, however, under which residents are asked to pay for waste collection directly-based on the amount of garbage they actually generate. They're called "pay-as-you-throw" programs, and nearly 2,000 communities across the country have begun using them.

What is pay-as-you-throw?

Pay-as-you-throw is a different way of paying for waste collection and disposal services. In some pay-as-you-throw communities, it works on a per-container basis: households are charged for each bag or can of waste they generate. A few communities bill residents based on the weight of their trash. Either way, the system motivates people to recycle more and think about how to generate less waste in the first place.

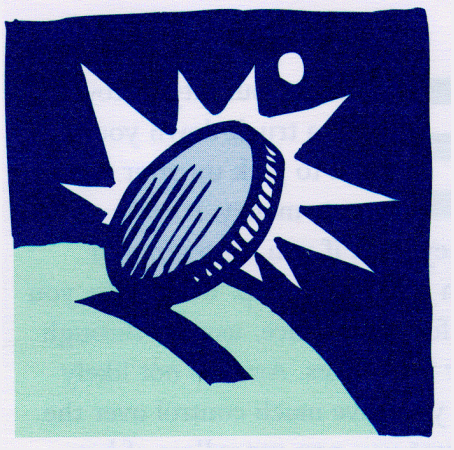
For community residents, however, the most important advantage of pay-as-you-throw may be the fairness and greater control over costs that it offers. Do you have neighbors who never seem to recycle and always leave out six or seven bags of trash? While you may not have thought about it, right now you're

Save As You Reduce and Recycle

helping them pay for that waste. Under pay-as-you-throw, everyone pays only for what they generate-so you won't have to subsidize your neighbor's wastefulness any more. It's only fair. With pay-as-you-throw, when you recycle and prevent waste, you're rewarded with a lower trash bill.

Because of these potential cost savings, both you and your neighbors will naturally want to reduce the amount of waste that you generate. And when people reduce waste, that can mean lower costs for your community, since it costs less to collect and dispose of everyone's trash. This might even free up funding for other municipal services you depend upon-like schools and fire and police protection.

In addition, the pay-as-you-throw incentive to put less waste at the curb can make a big environmental difference. When people generate less waste and recycle more, fewer natural resources are used and there is less pollution from manufacturing. Valuable landfill space is conserved as well, reducing the need to site new facilities.



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Are there disadvantages to pay-as-you-throw?

While there are potential barriers to a successful program, communities with pay-as-you-throw report that they have found effective solutions. Illegal dumping is a frequently raised issue. While people often assume that illegal dumping will increase once residents are asked to pay for each container of waste they generate, most communities with pay-as-you-throw have found this not to be the case. This is especially true when communities offer their residents recycling, composting for yard trimmings, and other programs that allow individuals to reduce waste legally. Others, particularly lower-income residents, worry about how much they will have to pay. In many communities, however, coupon or voucher programs are helping to defray their expenses.

What can I do?

If you're interested in pay-as-you-throw, talk to your town planner or local elected representatives! Ask them if they know about pay-as-you-throw and whether they would consider using it in your community. In addition, if you want to learn more about pay-as-you-throw, or if your local town planner is seeking specific tools to help design and implement pay-as-you-throw in your community, EPA has developed a wide range of products that can help. To find out more about EPA's collection of community success stories, program-planning tools, guidebooks, and other products, call the Pay-as-you-throw Helpline toll free at 888-EPA-PAYT.