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New recycling bins with tracking chips coming to Alexandria

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 May 6, 2010

Alexandria residents soon will have to pay for larger home recycling bins featuring built-in monitoring devices.

The City Council added a mandatory \$9 charge to its residents' annual waste collection fee.

That cash -- roughly \$180,000 collected from 19,000 residents-- will pay for new larger recycling carts equipped with computer microchips, which will allow the city to keep tabs on its bins and track resident participation in the city's recycling program.



(Andrew Harnik/Examiner)

"If you know who's participating in the programs, you can focus your education and outreach to those who are not participating," said Stacy Herring, Alexandria's recycling coordinator.

Rich Baier, Alexandria's environmental services program director, said the city will use direct mailing campaigns and public presentations to target neighborhoods -- not individuals -- that lag when it comes to recycling.

"We're just trying to get the biggest bang where we need it for the buck," Baier said. "We don't want to get into exactly what people are recycling."

The new carts will come in sizes ranging from 25 to 65 gallons, and will sport wheels and lids. While the \$9 charge is mandatory, residents may keep their old 18-gallon bins if they so choose.

Councilman Frank Fannon, the lone City Council member to oppose the new recycling bins, said he was against increased government spending, not recycling.

"I thought this was just another fee that we didn't have to pass on to the residents," he said.

A a glance

Herring said the city conducted a survey among Old

» **Cost to Alexandria residents:** Roughly

Town residents last May that found 60 percent wanted larger bins. She also said other jurisdictions had implemented bigger recycling bins and had seen recycling rates shoot up as a result.

"The larger the container, the more people recycle," Herring said, citing a study conducted by Eureka Recycling, a Minnesota nonprofit organization that promotes recycling.

Alexandria recently reported a 29 percent recycling rate to the state. Virginia requires most localities to recycle 25 percent of its waste, while the Environmental Protection Agency advocates a 35 percent target.

Baier said larger bins increase recycling rates because residents tend to throw their excess recyclables into regular trash cans once their recycling bins fill up.

He also said litter was a problem with the current bins, which don't have lids to prevent light materials from blowing out into area neighborhoods.

Venishka Hurdle, who coordinates recycling education programs in Arlington, said the county implemented larger, tracking-chip loaded recycling bins last year and saw the curbside recycling rate jump roughly 24 percent. The county's overall recycling rate is about 40 percent, she said.

"They've been a huge success," Hurdle said of the new bins. "Residents love them, and they recycle more materials as well."

Hurdle said Arlington County is collecting data from the bins' microchips, but had not yet used that data to improve recycling outreach and education programs.

Alexandria residents can expect to see their waste collection fees jump up in July, and likely will receive their new bins this summer.

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\$180,000, or about \$9 per bin

» **Bin size:** Ranges from 25 to 65 gallons, replacing the old 18-gallon bins

» **Time frame for implementation:** August or September

» **Alexandria's current recycling rate:** About 29 percent

» **Alexandria's target:** 35 percent

» **Expected recycling rate increase using new bins:** At least 2 percent

Source: Alexandria Department of Transportation and Environmental Services