

LOCAL NEWS

Recycling arguments go another round



Yfat Yossifor / Standard-Times For about 10 years Tim Hall, a retired professor, has picked up recyclables every week from a church, the San Angelo Chamber of Commerce, two financial organizations and West Texas Counseling and Guidance to drop off at SAFE Recycling Center.

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Think you know trash? Take [our quiz](#) to find out how informed you are about San Angelo's trash and recycling program.

Recent trash talks led to a robust conversation about recycling in San Angelo.

Shane Kelton, the city's operations director, said San Angeloans cover the spectrum — from the "you can't make me recycle" types to those who diligently recycle, and everything in between.

Right now Republic Services picks up recycling every week and bulk items quarterly, but the city is exploring the idea of making bulk pickup monthly and recycling pickup every other week, with an additional can provided free to heavy recyclers.

R.A. Cantrell, a regular at the trash meetings who fell short in a bid to join the City Council in May, opposes recycling.

"The idea of recycling has been massaged into the minds of the public until its become acceptable ... become virtuous," he said at the city's final trash forum. "Recycling is one of the most wasteful human activities."

San Angeloan Barbara Durkay shared another perspective at the forum. She warned that her suggestion wouldn't be the preferable way to recycle, but that the city could do it like other countries.

"In Germany you're forced to recycle because your trash can is only about this high and this big a round." Durkay said, demonstrating the size with arm motions. "When you're forced to recycle, you get into the habit real quickly and then its just a natural part of your life."

Kelton told the forum audience that a few cities along the I-35 corridor already are doing something similar to Germany. "They actually have trash police," he told the audience. "They hire people to go around and police your trash, to see if you're actually recycling or throwing away recyclables. That's not as far away as you think."

Another resident, Heidi Brooks, shared her experience at the meetings. "I grew up in Austin. They recycle every other week and they recycle numerous things, including glass, which is the weightiest part of recycling," Brooks said. "So for us to get that 50 cent extra tab" — a surcharge for not reaching recycling weight targets — "we're being punished for not recycling, when you're not even giving us the opportunity to recycle the things that create the weight."

The surcharge was included in the 10-year trash contract and landfill operations agreement the city made with Republic Services in 2014. The surcharge fees go to Butts Recycling Inc., the San Angelo company that deals with the recyclable items Republic picks up.

"The 500-ton amount is what Butts Recycling said they'd need to break even, pay their bills," Kelton said in a previous interview. Butts doesn't take glass items because of safety concerns.

"Fort Worth has automated sorting, but they also have the volume to need that and they run 24/7," Fred Preston, of Butts Recycling, said earlier this year. "We don't have the same volume in San Angelo and it would be cost prohibitive for us.

"You have living human beings sorting through all these items by hand."

Kelton was also asked why businesses and apartment complexes are not required to recycle. While apartment complexes are residential in nature, they are commercial entities offering a service to clients, Kelton said, adding that all businesses can choose to recycle if they want.

"The City Council at that time didn't want to tie the hands of existing businesses," he said in an interview with Standard-Times. "In fact, commercial businesses can use anybody (any company) offering recycling services. It's an open market."

If an apartment complex put in a dumpster to collect recyclables in addition to a trash dumpster, the manager would have to monitor whether appropriate items were tossed into each, he said.

"We have contamination issues just with our residential customers. Can you imagine the contamination issues you'd have if you just put out an extra dumpster?" Kelton asked. "Monitoring would be almost a job in itself. A lot of apartment managers don't want to take that on."

Councilman Harry Thomas said San Angelo has a long way to go in terms of recycling, and the answer lies in education. "Only about 40 percent of the people are recycling. Out of that there are a number of people — about 33 percent — that are mingling trash in their recycling," he said. "So If we are ever going to get to that 500 tons then we really need to educate everybody on how we do that."

San Angelo resident Barbara Montague said at the forum that the city was contradicting itself. "I think you are sending a real mixed message when on the one hand you say we want to educate the community about recycling, and then you say we want to reduce the recyclable pickup by 50 percent."

Lloyd Paschal, director of the San Angelo Friends of the Environment recycling center, has kept up with the discussions.

Paschal thinks the city's proposal to perform bulk pickup monthly and recycling pickup every other week would work for San Angelo.

"I personally support that," she said. "I would also like to see people recycle correctly."

Paschal agreed that more education would help, but she also said people should pay attention to the directions printed on the green bins.

Some of the don'ts she shared: Don't put things in bags, except for shredded paper in see-through bags. Don't put cardboard boxes and other recyclables in the trash "because they are not trash."

She said people need to think long term. "You don't have to recycle, but its better for the earth," Paschal said, adding that many resources are not endless — like the supply of oil that helps produce plastics. "If you keep throwing things away, the landfill is going to get full. Then you'll have to purchase more land, and that will cost taxpayers money."

Recycling not only impacts people in the here and now, but also future generations, Paschal said.

"It's better for everybody if everybody recycles."

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