



## City of Houston

### *NEWS RELEASE*

## Solid Waste Management Department

**Harry J. Hayes, Director**

**Annise D. Parker, Mayor**

*For Immediate Release*

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### **HOUSTON CELEBRATES GREAT SUCCESS WITH ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRAMS** *YARD WASTE PROGRAM SAVES CITY \$1.5 MILLION*

The City of Houston Solid Waste Management Department implemented a change to its ordinance which governed the way that yard waste is collected. On April 5, 2010, the Solid Waste Management Department crews stopped picking up yard waste in petroleum-based (plastic) bags. Residents who placed yard waste at the curb had to put this valuable material in City of Houston-approved compostable bags.

The City's new Yard Waste Recycling Program has been instrumental in helping the Solid Waste Management Department save taxpayer dollars and landfill space in tough economic times. The disposal savings in the first year has been over \$1.5 million. The department has diverted 25,526 tons of yard waste.

This program provides a vital role in Houston's economy. Green waste represents approximately 33% of the waste stream. By providing the Yard Waste Program, as well as the Tree Waste Recycling program, the City of Houston Solid Waste Management Department gives these natural resources another life. Living Earth, the corporate partner, converts the yard waste into mulch and other soil amendments.

Houston's Solid Waste Management Department has implemented a "Wheel of Savings" (please see photo). By diverting yard waste, the department saves money which results in the department's ability to expand the Automated Recycling Program to more Houston residents (with RecycleBank Rewards). The more that residents recycle at the curb, the department is able to divert more garbage from the landfill, which in turn allows the department to save more money and add more homes to the Automated Recycling Program which allows us to save money and provide message reinforcements through education and public information. This Wheel of Savings gives a highlight of how valuable the yard waste diversion is to having a successful integrated solid waste management system.

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The remarkable aspect of the Yard Waste program is how City of Houston residents have received the program. The City of Houston has seen virtually 100% compliance. There has not been a “jump” in garbage tonnage. The garbage numbers have stayed the same. Also, residents were informed that they have options: 1) Grasscycling (letting the grass lay on the lawn after clipping, 2) Backyard composting; or 3) Use of City of Houston-approved Compostable bags. The Department has seen the yard waste volume at the curb reduced by 61%.

While in its first year of the new yard waste collection methods, the City of Houston Solid Waste Management Department has received the State of Texas Alliance for Recycling (STAR) Award and the Mayor’s Proud Partner Award for this environmentally-sound and cost-effective program. Many surrounding Texas cities are exploring this program and considering implementing it based on Houston’s tremendous success.



Other highlights:

- Big Belly Solar compactors were obtained by the Solid Waste Management and Parks & Recreation Departments through grant money provided by HGAC and the TCEQ. These 10 new recycling kiosks can be found at the City Hall reflection pool area and other Houston



parks. These solar-operated sites will provide an 80% reduction in collections which saves time, fuel and emissions plus offer opportunities to recycle at participating Houston area parks. These “intelligent waste stations” use wireless monitoring which transmits to a central server when it is full and ready for collection.

- City now has 105,000 homes in the Automated (Single-Stream) Recycling Program with RecycleBank Rewards.
- An additional 100,739 homes have dual stream 18-gallon bins for curbside recycling.
- The Tree Waste Recycling Program has allowed the city to divert 244,000 tons of material from area landfills. In fiscal year 2010 alone, 42,173 tons were diverted saving the City \$747,121 dollars in avoided disposal costs.
- City has recycled over 11, 174 tons of Christmas trees in the last 20 years of the program.
- Department has diverted over 500 tons of building materials from area landfills by allowing contractors, businesses and individuals to bring this construction material to the City of Houston Reuse Warehouse.
- Two new Neighborhood Depositories/Recycling Centers were added last year to offer additional recycling opportunities for every Houstonian.

For more information, please log on to [www.houstonsolidwaste.org](http://www.houstonsolidwaste.org) or call 3-1-1, the City’s Customer Service Hotline.

The Solid Waste Management Department provides solid waste service to the citizens of Houston through the collection, disposal and recycling of discarded material in a manner that is safe, efficient, environmentally sound and cost-effective.

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