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Are you willing to pay price to reverse Broward's dramatic drop in recycling?

Florida's new Rethink, Reset, Recycle program suggests that residents make sure they're putting the right materials in their bins. The state campaign says, "When in doubt, throw it out."



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Recycling used to be a no-brainer. Now people wonder whether their efforts make a difference.

Broward's recycling rate has plummeted the past five years while the amount of county waste going into a landfill has doubled.

As a result, worried civic leaders are having to rethink recycling policy.

And they face two major tasks to tackle the worsening garbage problem:

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as of dollars for needed improvements.

-- Convincing people that what they put into their recycling carts really will be recycled.

A Broward consultant suggests local governments work together to build a publicly owned recycling operation, build a plant to remove recyclables that are mixed in with the garbage, and expand an incineration plant — or build a second one — that burns waste to produce electricity.

The construction costs are eye-popping: Up to \$549 million if the projects include expanding the incinerator, and up to \$1.39 billion if they include building a new one.

The consultant, Arcadis Design & Consultancy, recommends creating a government agency to oversee garbage disposal and recycling countywide, with the power to levy taxes to pay for what's needed.

Before city and county leaders can start selling the idea to residents, they have to agree if that's the direction they want to take.

What's at stake

Some think residents will go along with a plan, even a costly one, if it can show environmental benefits.

"I think if we base our decisions just off of what the costs are, it probably will not be consistent with what our constituents want," Miramar Mayor Wayne Messam said. "I would bet that our residents, our community, would want to have a sustainable community. ... I don't want to imagine a hundred years from now what our county would look like if everything that we process is buried in a landfill."

However, Margate Mayor Arlene Schwartz fears residents might think it futile trying to recycle goods when it can be hard to find a market for them and much of the goods **end up in the landfill**.

"We're going to have to sell to our constituents why we **charge them for recycling**, and then we would charge them for a special taxing district. It's a great concern," Schwartz said.

The consultants are also recommending new policies, such as requiring that multi-family properties and commercial businesses recycle.

"The primary objective ... is how can you achieve the 75 percent recycling goal mandated by the state," said Leah Richter, project manager for Arcadis, which is being paid \$200,000 for its work. "It's quite a ways from where you are today to that goal."

And Broward has been going in the wrong direction.

Recycling woes

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to 47 percent last year. Those numbers include
litional recycling is considered, Broward's rate
2013.

That means more trash is ending up in the landfill. The amount Broward dumped doubled from 1 million tons in 2012 to 2 million tons last year. That's better than in Miami-Dade County, where landfilled waste tripled from 1.1 million tons to 3.3 million tons during the same time. But it's worse than Palm Beach County, which saw only a 5 percent increase, from 719,000 tons to 756,000 tons

Palm Beach County opened a second incinerator during that period. Broward, in contrast, lost one, with Wheelabrator Technologies Inc. **shutting down one of its** two taxpayer-financed incinerators.

Palm Beach County is close to the state's 2020 recycling goal. Its recycling rate last year was 70 percent, including credit for waste burned to produce electricity, and 45 percent for traditional recycling.

The county has a separate public entity, its Solid Waste Authority, which owns and operates its incinerators, landfill and a materials recycling facility. This year's assessment to single-family homeowners is \$181.

The Broward alliance that built and paid for the Wheelabrator incinerators — a board made up of the county and 26 of its 31 cities — disbanded in 2013.

A new home for recycling?

One of its assets is a 25-acre Pompano Beach site, east of Florida's Turnpike between Copans and Sample roads, near the landfill popularly called Mount Trashmore.

Arcadis recommends the property not be sold. It said the site could have multiple uses, including:

- A recycling center, where material would be processed and packaged for reuse.
- A mixed-waste processing plant, where additional recyclables would be removed from garbage before being incinerated or put in a landfill.
- An operation to recycle bulky waste and construction and demolition debris.
- An organic processing center to compost vegetative waste.

To give the county and cities more time to consider the idea, the County Commission in September voted to put off any sale of the site for up to three years. The 26 cities have until Jan. 20 to agree or the land will be sold.

Broward Mayor Beam Furr supports keeping the site and creating joint facilities for the city and county to use.

Furr said the ultimate decision should come down to "recycling everything we can, not worrying about necessarily the cost or making a profit, but doing what's right."

ontrols the recycling operations, Furr said.

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“When it’s in the hands of a company that their job is to make a profit, they’re going to try to make a profit,” he said. “If it’s not to their benefit to recycle it, they’re going to bury it. We have a different choice.”

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