

The “Dirty Job” of Mattress Recycling in Buncombe County

Overview

In 2009, Buncombe County initiated a pilot mattress recycling program to address the large amount of landfill space occupied by mattresses. They also recognized the high degree of recyclability of mattresses, including the cotton fill, metal springs and wood frames. The County contracted with Conigliario Industries, a mattress recycling firm, to collect and recycle the mattresses.

Implementation

Citizens brought their used mattresses to the landfill where County staff would receive them. Fully suited in protective gear, County staff would stack various sizes of mattresses in one storage trailer like puzzle pieces. Once the mattress recycler’s trailer would arrive (they only had one at a time), staff would move the mattresses into the trailer for transport. This was a highly time-consuming endeavor, fraught with hazards such as lifting these heavy mattresses when wet or exposure to their unsanitary condition.

Keys to Success

Unfortunately, the program was not renewed because of the cost of recycling mattresses, the staff time needed to supplement the program’s operation and the health hazard posed by used mattresses. These elements should be addressed prior to any local government’s consideration of such a program.

Recycling Program Results

While the program was operational, the County collected over 200 mattresses a week. However, the cost was approximately \$18.50 per mattress to pay for transport and recycling. This figure does not include the staff time devoted to the program. At this rate, the county would have spent \$178,000 per year. With budget constraints and its priorities to keep jobs, the county cancelled the program.

*Type of Facility:
Local Government*

*Present Owners Recycle Since:
The County’s mattress recycling program operated during 2009-2010.*

*Recycles:
Buncombe County recycles all materials typically accepted in a local government recycling program.*

*Cost of Recycling
Services vs. Disposal Costs:
The County finds the PAYT system to be highly economical, as citizens pay for the amount of waste they throw away and are able to recycle at no cost.*

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