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Initial results in for Hood River solid waste program

Whether you like or dislike Hood River's new solid waste program, one thing's certain: it's helping the environment.

By now city residents should be accustomed to the new program that began May 1, utilizing the three roll-cart system that separates distinct waste streams – organic waste, garbage and recyclables – for processing and environmental benefits.

The city's two business partners, Hood River Garbage and Dirt Hugger, credit startup success to a year's worth of upfront work by the Waste Working Group, a team of business owners, city council members, Tri-County Hazardous Waste and other volunteers who designed the program.

"From cart sizing to enforcement by Hood River Garbage, the result has been some of the cleanest feedstock we've ever received," reports Pierce Louis of Dirt Hugger, the company that processes the organic waste into compost. "This compost will benefit local farmers and gardeners by adding organic matter to our depleted soils. Plus a potent source of methane is removed when keeping this waste out of landfills."

Word is in: collection of organic material is up 56% in the first five months of the program, with 681 tons of food scraps and yard debris collected in the City of Hood River since May 1. The total includes food scraps from restaurants, self-haul yard debris delivered to the transfer station, and organic waste picked up curbside. The 245-ton increase in organic matter over collections in the same period last year is directly

attributable to the new solid waste program, says Louis, who also reports a 90-ton reduction of carbon dioxide based on a greenhouse gas emissions formula.

The new program runs with the same number of Hood River Garbage truck trips used before its inception due to the alternating biweekly pick ups of recycling and garbage, so curbside organic collections, generally considered about 1/3 of a household's waste, have been added without negative impacts to the environment. Other positive results have been improved worker and resident safety with rolling carts, plus the spared nuisance of wind blown lids and garbage bins rolling around town.

If Hood River Garbage customers desire access to Dirt Hugger's compost, it's available for purchase locally at Hood River Supply and Bryant Pipe and Supply.

Recycling diversions are more difficult to quantify since Hood River's recycling collections are combined with transfer station self-haul (where traffic appears to have dropped), and recyclables pick-ups in the county and Urban Growth Area. Although recycling has likely increased, convenience is added by more curbside capacity.

"Overall, we've had many positive comments and relatively few complaints about the new system," explains Jim Winterbottom of Hood River Garbage. "Most issues were easily resolved with only 20 or so customers approaching us with problems we couldn't solve satisfactorily. Considering 2,200 city customers and 6,600 carts, we feel the roll out went smoothly. "

Winterbottom warns, however, that larger recycling containers do not make previously unacceptable items, such as plastic grocery bags or clam-shell plastics, acceptable.

"With a global recycling crisis occurring, it's imperative customers know what our recycling program accepts and puts only those clean items in recycling containers," he adds. As processor sort lines slow down to remove contaminants from commingled recycling, a backlog is creating strain and added expense to the system resulting in temporary permission to landfill some recycling. The Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) is working on short-term solutions and long-term changes to recycling systems. To learn more, visit:

<http://www.oregon.gov/deq/mm/Pages/Recycling-Markets.aspx>

Important Reminders:

- The City of Hood River has discontinued annual fall leaf service. Residential customers can place leaves and yard debris in compost roll carts, or take loads to the Hood River Transfer Station. Drop on Wednesdays for a discounted \$5 charge.
- The importance of clearing carts from curbs increases as seasons change. Remove bins promptly for street cleaning and snow removal.

- Carts may be exchanged for available smaller or larger sizes as a one-time free benefit by phoning Hood River Garbage at 541-386-2272.
- Place only clean, acceptable items in recycling bins.
- Conserve resources by minimizing use of disposable packaging.
- For more information, visit hoodrivergarbage.com or <http://ci.hoodriver.or.us/SolidWasteAndRecycling>.

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Photo caption: Stowing the new solid waste program three roll-cart system off the public right-of-way is an issue some residents are creatively solving with covered storage or screens.

