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WASH. UT. & TP. COMM

Comment # 3903

February 5, 2008



Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission
Post Office Box 47250
Olympia, WA 98504-7250

Commission:

I recently received a rate increase notice inviting public comment. For several years I have wondered if charging for recycling and yard waste pickup discourages their use. It is possible that when some people are confronted with the additional charges for either of these two services, they are less likely to use them. This increases the amount of material that has to be processed as garbage and there are also related affects based on the perceived alternatives.

We had some neighbors for awhile that would put out four garbage cans and no recycling bins every week. It is probable that half of that garbage could have been recycled (based on our own proportions – one garbage can, one recycling container), but perhaps the additional charge for the recycling service deterred that. There may also be a perception that to separate the recycling material takes too much effort, but the system should be established to encourage that. If there were no charge for recycling, then people may be more inclined to use it.

A similar phenomenon applies to yard waste, except an alternative that is often used is to burn it. Often obnoxious smoke pervades our neighborhood from people burning yard debris. Presented with paying to have it hauled away and burning it (for free), the choice is simple for some. The result is terrible for the air and health of all of us. As the region has become more populated, burning has become completely unacceptable, and the alternative to dispose of that material properly should not present an economic choice.

There are also those that burn garbage and/or material that should be recycled, which further generates noxious pollutants. The latter of these could be addressed by eliminating the charge for recycling, but both need restrictions and enforcement from a different authority. There is an opportunity for garbage, recycling, and yardwaste rates to influence this unhealthy and obnoxious situation, though.

Recycling should be encouraged because it is environmentally responsible. Material that could have been recycled but instead goes to landfills should be penalized. Material that should be composted and recycled should not be burned. Sometimes doing the right thing is not cost effective, but that does not change its rightness and it should be supported.

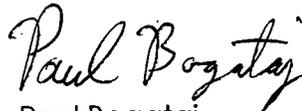
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If minimizing recycling and yardwaste charges requires raising garbage rates to support that, than so be it. The total charges collected could remain the same, but those who are irresponsible and refuse to recycle and elect to pollute the air should pay more of that amount rather than less as they currently do, and those that choose to be responsible should be rewarded. This would create incentive to be responsible.

Since there would be no profit in recycling or yardwaste pickup service because all revenue would be generated through garbage service, it will need to be a requirement that any provider of garbage pickup must also provide recycling and yardwaste pickup. The charge would really be for all services, and it would not allow people to opt out of recycling or yardwaste pickup (as currently allowed). They may not choose to use them, but they will be paying for them, so hopefully, they will act responsibly.

Also, perhaps reducing the rates for recycling and yard waste pickup (subsidized by garbage rates) might lead to garbage being disposed of in the recycling or yard waste containers, but that could be dealt with through penalties. The objective should be to encourage correct behavior. I encourage some creative thinking about how the rate structure can persuade people to act in the most responsible manner.

Sincerely,


Paul Bogataj