

Data Management Notes: October 2007

The Recycling Data Management “Workshop from TV Land: ‘Watching your Data’” was the theme for this year’s episode and resulted in light-hearted moments while exploring the challenges of managing recycling data in Pennsylvania.

Two concurrent sessions, following the television show theme, opened the workshop. “Lingo” was a session designed for newer recycling coordinators that are still sometimes trying to sort out the “lingo” of data collection and management. Attendees were given details about Act 101 and a copy of the Education Committee’s “Recyclopedia” that includes information about acronyms, Act 101, composting, contacts, special dates, and terms.

More experienced coordinators were part of the “CSI” session that was designed to explore the more rigorous data collection and compilation that helps analyze your program and convey its success or difficulties to decision makers and the customers.

Ed Micciolo and Eileen Marks of Abington Township discussed the data they collect and its importance in keeping elected officials informed and better understanding collection efficiency. Dan Grow explained how his data collection has allowed him to better understand collection logistics with the goal of improving collection efficiency. Elk County Recycling Coordinator Bekki Titchner discussed her county’s largest community and how enhanced data collection has helped her better understand how they can bring more consistent performance throughout the entire community.

DEP’s John Lundsted and Sharon Svitek led participants through an exercise, in our “Weakest Link” session, to better understand what common mistakes are made in gathering data that will withstand the rigorous documentation standards of the Performance Grant applications. Worksheets were distributed and attendees were divided into groups of 2. They were instructed to find any inconsistencies or missing information in the forms. Afterwards, their decisions were discussed.

To lighten up the day, Todd Pejack (aka “Dr. Phil - but you can call me ‘Land’”) was most entertaining in assessing the frustrations and complexities of making and retaining relationships in order to fulfill Act 101 obligations. He was ably assisted by various DEP personnel who openly shared their myriad provocative situations that would be pale in comparison if described here.

In the “Family Feud”, public and private sector recycling professionals discussed the needs and struggles of each group. The dialog should help to further enhance the improvements in streamlining and standardizing the reporting to enable accurate numbers without overwhelming the private sector.

One of the specific issues that was raised regarded the requests for commercial customer lists. Some DEP staff noted that commercial customer lists did not necessarily have to be collected or compiled by county or municipal recycling offices to provide for Performance Grant documentation. Rather, access to needed information from the hauling firms or recyclers needs to be available to DEP. This is particularly important in identifying anomalies or apparent inconsistencies that would indicate data irregularities.

Licensing of haulers was also discussed. Cheryl Kelly of Butler County added that the Northwestern counties were discussing how they might license vehicles that are not part of the Act 90 state licensing program. They believe that the first step is to make local ordinances more uniform to enable the licensing of all vehicles. This would aid in facilitating oversight of all waste haulers and recyclers, not just those licensed by the state.

Upon reflection, it seemed that the operative word for both the Weakest Link and Family Feud segments was the need for constant communication. Communication is essential between the municipality/county and the hauler (and vice versa); between the DEP and municipality/county (and vice versa); between the businesses and municipality/county (and vice versa) and on down the line. Continual communication is the key in getting numbers and maintaining a good working relationship.

The last session of the day was “The Twilight Zone.” DEP staffers ably answered questions posed by the attendees. Discussion included deadline dates, the impact of administration fee legislation, and establishing an efficient database.

With all the facts and figures tallied, this year’s Data Management class was “The Real McCoy!”