



Feature

Luis Sanchez, Jr. – On the Job!

I've known Lu for awhile, and I know him to be a man of equanimity – probably a very good character trait to have when one is dealing with many customers. In Lu's case, the customers are tens of thousands of residents of New Haven that get municipal garbage and recycling services at their homes.

Having started in the Public Works Department of New Haven 25 years ago, Lu came up through the ranks as a worker in the Street Division, driver, scale house operator supervisor, and now, for the last several years, Superintendent of Refuse and Recycling. Needless to say, he knows his way around!

I talked to Lu recently about the state of curbside recycling in the City:

Like most municipalities in Connecticut, New Haven started curbside recycling in the 1990's. In about 2007 the curbside bins were replaced with toters, then the larger 96 gallon toters you see today. Right beside them sits a smaller, 65 gallon toter which is meant for household trash only. That ratio – 96/65 Recycling/Garbage roughly represents the current target or goal of diversion in the City.

Recycling is picked up on the same day as trash, and weekly (some municipalities only pick up recyclables once ever-other-week). So there is plenty of opportunity for households to recycle... But what is it like 'on the ground?'



What is it like on the ground for collecting curbside recycling? What types of items do you see that are not recyclable in the bin (or around it)?

“A lot of plastic toys, bags, and bulky items, stuff that residents think should be recycled.” He says that the crews on the truck will try to explain that these items are not recyclable, if they find a resident outside the home. They may knock on the door and see if anyone is home. If not, they will typically just leave the items by the curbside. The workers do have informative stickers that they can place on the recycling toter indicating what is recyclable and what is not.

what % of the blue toters are contaminated? (contamination = non-recyclable items)

“Well on [the routes for] Mondays and Fridays, 80 to 90% is good recycling.” But on Tuesday and Wednesday, and sometimes on Thursday, the contamination can be rampant. I asked Lu why he thought that was, and he said more messaging is needed. Others are opportunists who just see the blue bins as “extra-large bins” for their trash!

Is there any incetivization program for better compliance?

“Right now we don't have the manpower to enforce He currently calls Public Works inspectors when he notices a particularly problematic area, and they monitor, will issue a verbal warning for contaminated recycling (recycling with unacceptable items), and then a formal warning if contamination is still evident. The third visit results in a citation. This applies for those who dispose of recycling in trash as well.

There is word in the wind that the City is looking to address curbside recycling challenges by hiring a recycling coordinator, in which case messaging, monitoring and tagging can become more systematic and routine.

How many households do not put out any recycling? (on a typical block) (worst to best areas)

“The same areas have less participation, especially in the case of 3-family homes.”

When a bin is “contaminated” with incorrect items, what does the crew do? If it is just a little bit of contamination do you pick it up? Discard the inappropriate items first?

If contamination is spotted readily in the top of the recycling bin, the item(s) will be pulled and left for trash, and vice-versa with recyclables found in trash.

How do you message the residents on recycling?

He and Cynthia Rivera from the code enforcement department (inspectors) recently did a broadcast on local radio regarding compliance issues. Residents receive literature in English and Spanish on correct practices for recycling when they get their toters. There is also a rack in the foyer of the residential information center at 34 Middletown Avenue with more information on recycling and the Transfer Station. Certain areas of concern are addressed in the “message from Parks & Public Works” monthly in this newsletter. And of course you can always get information on curbside recycling and recycling in general on these things from this Newsletter! Lu states that when he is out about town during the day he talks to residents and tries to be “as informative as I can be.”

I know that your department employs the use of a separate pick-up truck. How does that work?

Yes, they have a truck designated to bring trash and recyclables that haven't been picked up, (or which have been left illegally by the roadside). (Public Works resident service center must be contacted first, at which time the staff will ask what type of materials they have. In the case of a blue toter that has not been picked up, the staff will inform them why it was left by the truck, and what they need to do to comply. If you are experiencing issues in this area, call (203) 946-7700.

In closing, I asked Lu if the City and his department have any initiatives planned that would increase diversion away from garbage.

Recently, there has been discussion about implementing a food-scrap collection program for composting. Lu is not sure about the details but the former director, Jeff Pescosolido and the newly formed Department of Climate and Sustainability were workshopping some ideas.

What is his vision for the Department?

“I want to see the residents be more cooperative and proactive - recycling more and producing less trash. Outside of that, I would like to see the City cleaner in general, making it a place we can be proud of and happy to live in.”

Thank you Luis Sanchez for your service to the Community!

 **Dep't. Where shall I Put This?**

You may be wondering how to dispose of or recycle these items:



Aerosol Cans – Where you dispose of aerosol cans depends on what was in the can. Cans containing food and food by-products may be recycled. (They must be completely empty, however.) Most others are considered household hazwaste and must be disposed of accordingly. HazWaste Central, 90 Sargent Drive, New Haven accepts these items from the end of May to the end of October, Saturdays 9-12. Register on online first:

<https://app.smartsheet.com/b/form/4613d9ef414440e7ab522a22cc23fb26>.

Animal carcasses – report to animal control 203 946-8110. Do not touch or move the dead animal.

Asbestos 'fill' (such as old insulation) – must be abated professionally if damaged. May be discarded in regular trash but is limited to 1 cubic foot at a time by Connecticut law.

Biomedical and infectious Waste – MUST NOT be put in regular trash, nor can it be brought to the Transfer Station. Contact your nearest hospital or a BMW (Biomedical Waste) collection service for more information.

Boats – Boats under 17 feet in length may be brought to the Transfer Station as demolition. (without inboard or outboard motors). However, you *must* present the title to the scale operator.

Food oils, grease – may be placed in regular trash in sealed containers in small quantities (from households). Commercial establishments or those with large amounts must be contracted for pickup with a local company which specializes in that service (see “motor oil and grease,” further down on this list).

Light bulbs – LED and florescent lights (or any light containing CFLs) are made with materials that are considered hazardous, and must be disposed of at HazWaste central. Only the 'legacy' incandescent and halogen lights are safe for disposal in regular trash.

Mercury light switches – (household wall switches with “smooth” operation installed prior to 2003) – If they are in working condition, re-purpose them, if they are damaged, remove carefully and bring to HazWaste Central.

Motor oil and grease – can be brought to HazWaste Central (from households).

Shredded paper – shredding paper makes it less recyclable, so only shred it if you have to. Place in trash

Thermometers and older thermostats – contain mercury and are considered hazardous waste. Bring them to HazWaste Central (see above for location and hours of operation)

Treated wood – can be brought to the Transfer Station as demolition (it must be weighed and paid for)

Underground storage tanks – are not acceptable as-is at ANY facility. See this link: <https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Underground-Storage-Tanks/Underground-Storage-Tanks> for proper preparation and certification of underground storage tanks.

Above-ground storage tanks – also have to be remediated. Typically their removal is handled by the establishment replacing them.

Feature Top Recycling Countries - How Do They Do It?

It is always a good idea to see what others are doing in order to learn about better practices. Seeing as the U.S. ranks 25th out of 32 in waste diversion, there is considerable room for improvement. So let's look at the top recycling countries in the world, and the policies that make them so...

GERMANY – 67% diversion rate

Waste Diversion Directive of 2012-

Top-down mandate emphasizing prevention and limiting products

Circular Economy Act - established mandates for diversion.

Key elements of the Act include: **phases out single-use packaging**. incentivises the use of reusable and recyclable materials in place of disposable ones. Introduces a mandatory segregation and incentivised charging regime for commercial waste.

/ Has 6 separate bins for home recycling, including for food waste.

/ Comprehensive composting focuses on non-recycleable paper as well as agricultural compost for feedstock.

/ EPR (Extended Producer Responsibility) started in the early 1990's: The 'green dot' system indicates on packaging which companies participate, so consumers can make green choices.

/ Extensive *reusable* deposit system

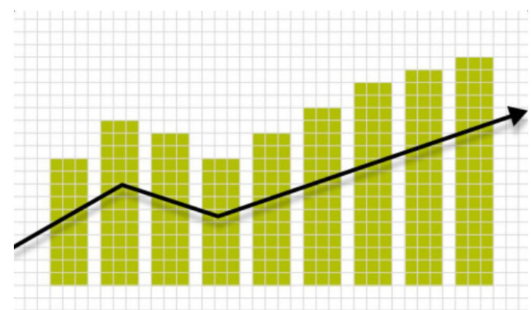
AUSTRIA - diversion rate 63.7%

/ Has a 5 bin system of separating items at the home

/ Large biomass infrastructure

/ Emphasis on WTE burn plants with triple filter system for much lower emissions.

/ EPR in the form of “The Packaging Ordinance” which increases corporate accountability and streamlines the payment system for recycling their packaging.



SOUTH KOREA - diversion rate 60%

/ A sudden boom in the economy caused landfills to become unmanageable, also causing water quality to plummet – this was major incentive.

/ Total ban on plastic bags and containers

/ Extensive EPR program

/ Since 2013, South Korea has had mandatory food scrap collection and composting. Small pay-as-you-throw bags can be purchased for 20 cents each. As a result they have almost 0% food waste.

SWITZERLAND - 53% waste diversion

/ PAYT system for garbage, driving recycling.

/ Enforcement system with stiff fines.

We can see that these countries employ strong EPR (Extended Producer Responsibility) programs, have top-down directives and in some cases, bans on wasteful processes such as certain single-use packaging. In Austria and South Korea, food waste is a significant stream and there is strong infrastructure supporting it. Germany and Austria have multiple bins for separating types of recycling (which actually makes it easier for consumers, and there is less likelihood of “wish-cycling” which can be rampant in our system of single-stream recycling.

My observation: All of the top recycling countries listed are in very high-density areas (Europe and Asia), and tend to have a socially-conscious participant-base. It makes sense that in these regions, where there is simply not enough room to just discard items, initiatives for non-use, reuse and conscious recycling are widely accepted by the public.

The U.S., with a 36% average diversion rate, is geographically very different from the countries mentioned. Considered in its entirety, it is much less densely populated so there may be the conception that there is a limitless amount of space to say, bury things in the ground! Also, the foremost recycling countries have a top-down *nationwide* approach to recycling, whereas in the U.S. recycling is by and large a state-by-state proposition, subsumed under the ideology of “states' rights.”

However, the United States does contain certain municipalities that are achieving high diversion rates. Let's check out one of them:

SAN FRANCISCO- 76% diversion rate!

- / 3 bin system (single-stream recycling, broad spectrum compostables and trash)
- / Extensive single-use plastic laws
- / Mandatory composting since 2009!
- / Percentage of demolition wood and other materials mandated to recycle
- / Auditing of commercial waste generators and use of zero-waste facilitators to coach those who do not comply.
- / Thorough outreach and messaging in multiple languages



San Francisco, partnering with Recology, is on course for zero waste

So why not in New Haven?

New Haven is working on its diversion rate (which currently stands at a meager 19%), and we at the Authority are doing our part to increase messaging about best practices and availability of resources for recycling, but the City still has a long way to go. With Connecticut surprisingly having the 3rd best recycling rate in the country (at 45%), it would seem that city-wide messaging and civic pride are the areas that need some work! Also, the current ongoing depressed markets for plastic in particular contribute to lack of growth in recycling infrastructure, and to higher tipping fees that in many cases eclipse those for solid waste. And systems that work for larger geographic areas mentioned above such as separate bins and more EPR programs would be less plausible for a city. However, the phasing in of the 10 cent bottle bill and getting top-down state legislation concerning home food waste and organics collection (and biomass processing plant construction) could help drive a significant reduction in the waste stream in the interim.

 **FYI On the Horizon!**



The New Haven Solid Waste & Recycling Authority (that's us!) will be holding its 4th annual **Hometown Recycling Day** drive-through recycling drop-off and awareness event on Saturday September 30, 2023. You can bring mattresses, box springs, electronics, clothing and accessories, lithium batteries and even paper to be shredded. You won't want to miss it! (more details to come in our next issue of R-N-H and on our website congresswoman)

Calendar of Events:

Hometown Recycling Day – September 30, 2023

NHSWRA and Southern Connecticut State University are co-sponsors of this major annual recycling event. (see article above)

City of New Haven meeting schedule:

<https://newhaven-ct.legistar.com/Calendar.aspx>

New Haven Parks and Public Works info:

A Message from Parks and Public Works Resident Services:

This is the perfect time of the year to properly clean your trash and recycling totes. You can use a disinfectant, all-purpose cleaner, or dish soap to saturate both the inside and outside of the tote. Adding a bit of baking soda can help get rid of odors! We cannot replace totes due to an odor, so we encourage cleaning them regularly.

New Haven residents with a valid CT state driver's license or picture ID can stop by our office at 34 Middletown Ave Monday-Friday 7 am - 4 pm to pick up free vouchers to be used at the Transfer Station. Vouchers cover yard waste (such as branches, brush, and leaves) and residential waste such as electronics, bulky waste, and furniture - This includes items around your house (think: garage, attic, storage room) that are not otherwise recyclable at the transfer station.

VOUCHERS DO NOT COVER DEMOLITION AND/OR CONSTRUCTION, STUMPS, OR BRANCHES LARGER THAN 6 INCHES AROUND AND WILL RESULT IN A FEE FOR THE RESIDENT. AS NOTED PREVIOUSLY GRASS CLIPPINGS, MULCH, AND DIRT ARE NOT ACCEPTED AT THE TRANSFER STATION!

We also schedule bulk appointments where we will pick up eligible items from your home placed on the curb. These appointments are scheduled on a month-to-month basis and spaces fill up QUICKLY! Please call our office at 203-946-7700 to verify eligibility. NOTE: There will be no bulk pick-up in September. Fees are associated with this service.

Did you know that See Click Fix also sends alerts? If you haven't reported a concern via the app, you can still sign up to receive alerts. You can create multiple points of interest and register to receive notifications for that area so you can get street sweeping notices where you live and where you work. We also send out notices to remind you that trash will be delayed for the holiday. [Please visit https://seeclickfix.com/new-haven](https://seeclickfix.com/new-haven) to sign up!

Links:

New Haven Public Works-

<https://www.newhavenct.gov/gov/depts/pw/>

Public Works paving schedule-

<https://www.newhavenct.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/15028/637903861608081376>

See Click Fix-

<https://seeclickfix.com/new-haven>

NHSWRA contact info and link:



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