Plastics Recycling: Reality on the Ground

MRN and SWANA Mid-Atlantic Annual Conference

*Plastics: An Ever-Evolving, Fast-Moving Target*

Richard Keller
Communications Specialist
Baltimore County Recycling Division

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Baltimore County

- Bureau of Solid Waste Management collects from more than 332,000 homes plus apartments
- 36 private collection companies collect trash and recycling from 52 routes
- County also accepts material at three residential drop-off centers located around the County
Collection Challenges

• County does once a week trash and once a week single stream recycling (except in designated routes with rodent problems)

• Challenge with plastics and other materials is to make residents aware of what is recyclable and what is trash and to limit the amount of contamination in the loads

• Survey shows that 95 percent (by weight) of what citizens put out for recycling is recyclable
Tanglers

• County has focused attention in social media and articles on reducing tanglers, which get on the star screens and require several hours of work each night.
“Tangled Up!”

• “Tangled Up” is a comedic, silent film style PSA produced in-house by 11 County employees

• Plastic bags, clothing, etc. – halts operations

• Won Silver Telly Award and National Association of Government Communicators Blue Pen and Gold Screen Award

• Shared by more than 170 government, business, media, nonprofits and industry professionals
“Tangled Up!”

• Shown at recycling and solid waste conferences

• Played in local movie theaters for 6 weeks (485,282 impressions). Theatre made exception to 60 second rule because “it was so well done and a short 90 seconds.”

• Key component of 2019 MRN Outstanding Government Leadership Award
“Tangled Up!”
Baltimore County MRF

• County MRF opened in November 2013
• Single stream facility accepts about 1500-1700 tons per week or about 80,000 tons per year
• Facility runs at about 35 tons per hour
• Facility includes 86 belts, six sorting screens, three optical sorters, cross belt magnet, eddy current and two balers
MRF – Plastics

• Large rigid plastics are separated in the pre-sort area of the facility
• Optical sorter separates about 70 percent of PET
• Sorters positively pick PET, Natural and Color
• “Trash” belt offers the opportunity to capture material that has gone through the process
Plastics Sales

• PET, Natural and Color are sold domestically
• Rigid plastics are often sold to Canadian firms
• County requests pricing each month and awards to the highest bidder
Plastics Challenges

• PET, Natural and Color have been stable markets

• Recent drop in PET and HDPE prices

• Rigid plastics – markets have improved so that June price is higher than cardboard

• Issue with metals in rigid plastics

• County looking for markets for mixed plastics and aseptics that justify sorting the materials
Contact

Richard Keller
Communications Specialist
Baltimore County Bureau of Solid Waste Management
Recycling Division
111 West Chesapeake Avenue, Room 225
Towson, MD 21204
410-887-2791
rkeller@baltimorecountymd.gov