

Business recycling effort underway despite griping

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Despite widespread skepticism about its costs and effectiveness, New York companies are grudgingly gearing up for the launch of the city's long-stalled commercial recycling drive.

The mandatory program, which began being phased in last week, requires companies to recover recyclable materials from their garbage or arrange for it to be done. Companies have six months to comply with the new program's first thrust, separating high-grade office paper, corrugated cardboard, some construction debris and metal containers, scrap and aluminum foil. Recycling other materials, such as newspapers, magazines, glass containers, plastic containers and film plastic, will be phased in over the following 18 months.

City officials say the recycling effort should help businesses save money by cutting down the amount of disposable waste that must be hauled away and dumped elsewhere, at the cost of \$1 billion. Officials argue that some larger companies may even generate a profit by selling the more valuable recyclable materials to burgeoning private markets.

"It's actually a business opportunity for some companies," says a spokeswoman for the Sanitation Department. She and other optimists point out that several companies and office buildings are now generating hundreds of thousands of dollars a year by recycling their own trash.

The city's trash-separation push is also proving to be a boon for the growing number of consultants, private carters and other entrepreneurs setting up recycling programs. Great Forest Inc., an 18-month-old Manhattan consulting firm, has added major clients like Tishman Speyer Properties, Mendik Realty and Olympia & York in recent months.

Program picking up

"It's starting to pick up," says Richard Fuller, president of Great Forest. "I think this is going to be a hit in Manhattan."

But many business leaders fear that the program will ratchet up costs for the city's 190,000 companies by imposing new burdens on them and the private carters that remove more than 10,000 tons of commercial waste daily. They also worry that the highly volatile markets for recyclable materials will dry up, leaving them with no disposal option under the city's demanding law.

In addition, some resent that companies are being forced to recycle at the same time that the city may scrap its residential recycling program because of its high expense. The Dinkins administration has proposed this move as a cost-saving measure.

"We think that business and government have to be partners in the whole solid-waste problem," says Patricia Brodhagen, director of public and consumer affairs for the New York State Food Merchants Association. "We feel the city should be doing no less than what it's asking its businesses to do."

Nevertheless, faced with the impending deadlines set by the regulations, more companies are starting to change the way they toss out their garbage. Although no official recycling figures exist, industry experts say bigger companies are setting up in-house

programs. office tenants are signing up for building-wide drives and others are making arrangements with private carters.

50 companies involved

For instance, at least 50 companies and 14 major commercial buildings now participate in office-paper recycling programs set up by the Council on the Environment of New York City, another recycling consultant.

At the same time, several private carters and scrap dealers have created recycling subsidiaries to serve their commercial customers and maintain their market. Examples include Allied Sanitation Inc. in Brooklyn, V. Ponte & Sons and Classic Sanitation.

Other local firms have recycled key waste products for years. Most of the city's major supermarkets now recover corrugated cardboard from their junk piles and sell it to dealers.

The commercial recycling regulations, a year late in development, grow out of the same two-year-old law that mandates residential recycling. The law calls for recycling 25% of the city's garbage by April 1994, including about half of the 10,000 tons of commercial waste produced daily. ■