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FEATURED

## Curbside compost pilot program starts today

By Kayla Beard Aug 5, 2018



Mary Jeeter, a volunteer with Americorps., holds up some of the new compost buckets. Photo provided.

Starting today (Monday), some Athens city residents can place small buckets of compostable materials at the curb alongside their recyclables to be picked up by workers from the Athens Hocking Recycling Centers (AHRC). Thanks to Rural Action's Zero Waste Program, this pilot program will allow city leaders to look at data and determine whether a permanent, citywide curbside compost program is feasible.

Zero Waste Program Manager Andrea Reany said in an email last week that the pilot program has 265 households participating. People began receiving green, five-gallon buckets last week, with labels attached to explain what materials are and are not acceptable for processing at the AHRC compost facility. A few families received larger rolling carts, Reany said.

“Unfortunately, we aren't able to take any more new sign-ups now that the program has started,” Reany said.

To recruit participants for the pilot, the Rural Action team advertised on social media and the city's website, and through a direct mailer that was sent out with Athens water bills. “People were able to call me to sign up or register on the online submission form that was posted to the city's website,” Reany explained.

AHRC Director Bruce Underwood said he thinks the pilot program will offer many lessons. “We're going to learn things about the program, how people react, how people are utilizing it, how often they're setting it out,” Underwood said, adding that he thinks the program is a great idea. “There's not many places in the state of Ohio that are doing it,” he said.

The AHRC compost facility has been collecting compostable materials since 2015, Underwood said, mostly collecting from commercial establishments in Athens, Nelsonville and The Plains. A booth had been placed at the Athens Farmers Market where a lot of people dropped off buckets of compostable materials in exchange for clean buckets, but Underwood said that exchange program is being discontinued as the curbside pilot program gets under way. Saturday was the last weekend for the exchange program.

“We've been putting that communication out to that group of customers who have been utilizing that service,” Underwood said. However, he added, for people who can't participate in the pilot and still need a place to drop off compostables, “all is not lost.” People can come to the facility directly, Underwood said, where “they can drop off for free, essentially.”

Based on his experience composting materials in the area so far, Underwood said he thinks the program will be successful. “The whole idea is to keep this material out of the landfill, so the more we can keep it out of the landfill, that helps with carbon emissions and sustainability goals of the city of Athens, but also it helps with diversion goals for the solid waste district,” he said.

The Athens Hocking Solid Waste District (AHSWD) is a governmental entity that contracts with AHRC, a non-profit company, to provide certain services throughout Athens and Hocking counties.

Underwood explained that the state mandates a certain percentage of waste be diverted from landfills. For commercial and residential waste, that goal is 25 percent, he said.

“The last go-around, we were only at just about 21 percent diversion, so we're still below that 25 percent for commercial and residential (waste),” Underwood explained. “This is going to be another additional step toward those diversion goals.”

Underwood said he hopes a citywide program will further help the AHRC and AHSWD achieve those diversion goals in the future.