

Downtown Recycling & Refuse Survey – BLACKSBURG, VA

(Last revised 14 August 2008)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purposes of this survey were: (1) to assess the extent of recycling; (2) to determine if there is an interest among the merchants for a recycling program; and (3) to learn how refuse is handled in downtown Blacksburg. The survey itself was written by professionals and administered in person by about 20 volunteers. An attempt was made to contact 101 businesses, and 68 responses were obtained. Of those respondents, about half (43%) were restaurants and quick-service-food establishments. From these merchants, we learned the following things.

- Very few downtown businesses actively recycle. Of those who do, cardboard was most often mentioned (57%), followed by cans (35%), plastic containers (25%), and glass bottles (24%).
- Only about half (47%) of those surveyed responded to the question about *how* recycling should be handled downtown. Of those who responded, almost all (91%) were enthusiastic about having a uniform recycling program downtown and said they would like to have the Town arrange it.
- Over half (62%) of the respondents said they have room indoors to store wheeled containers for recycling.
- Almost everything generated and not consumed by customers and merchants downtown ends up in the trash.
- Many vehicles are involved in hauling refuse downtown. The list includes three separate contractors making up to seven collections per week, and almost one-quarter (24%) of merchants who responded to this question haul their own trash, most likely to a centrally located dumpster.
- The cost of refuse removal from downtown businesses appears to vary from \$25 to \$485 per month.

SURVEY DETAILS

Business Types & Numbers Surveyed:

Restaurant – 18; Quick Service (food) – 11; Office – 12; Retail – 24; Automotive – 1; Other – 2.

Survey Questions With Responses: (Note that these first 6 questions deal with TRASH.)

1. **How do you dispose of your trash?** Shared dumpster – 31. Individual dumpster – 19. (29 said dumpster located “out back”). Self hauled – 8. Curbside trash cans – 7. Curbside bags – 1. Didn’t know – 1.
2. **Who hauls your trash?** Waste Management – 22. Self-hauled – 11. Bob’s Refuse – 7. Allied (BFI) – 6. Don’t know – 21.
3. **How often is your trash picked up?** Daily – 10. Three times per week – 4. Twice per week – 22. Once per week – 21. Don’t know – 21.
4. **What is the current cost for your trash disposal?** The range in costs given to the surveyors ranged from \$25 to \$485 per month. Twenty-five out of 67 respondents said they did not know this cost, because the absent business owner handled that, or the building owner included the unknown cost of trash disposal as par of their rent.
5. **When does your current contract with your trash hauler end?** Most everyone did not know.
6. **Do you have space on your premises, indoor or out, to store a provided 96, 64, or 35 gallon trash can that could be used for daily or frequent curbside trash pick up?** Space available – 37. No space available – 25. No response – 5. Room for 96 gallon – 11. Room for only 35 gallon – 5. Did not respond on container size – 51.

(Note that these next 7 questions deal with RECYCLING.)

7. **Which of the following materials do you recycle or donate for reuse?** *(Note that very few respondents included where they took these items for recycling. Some indicated they took the items home or to a central facility downtown. Corrugated cardboard was the most frequently item recycled, probably because some trash haulers also picked up cardboard for recycling, and there is at least one recycling bin downtown for cardboard.)*
Glass bottles – 16. Aluminum cans – 21. Plastic bottles & jugs – 17. Metal cans – 3. Food waste – 0. Oil & grease – 8. Corrugated cardboard – 39. White office paper – 14. Newspaper – 11. Glossy magazines & catalogs – 12. Fluorescent lamps – 14. Compact fluorescent lamps – 9. Ink & toner cartridges – 16. Batteries – 11. Electronics - 4. Building materials & pallets – 0. Yard waste – 0. Clothing & textiles – 3. Furniture & housewares – 2. Metals – 2. Other plastics & papers – 4.
8. **Who hauls your recycling?** Waste Management – 5. Self-hauled – 23. Bob’s Refuse – 5. Allied (BFI) – 1. Self hauled – 23. No recycling – 10.
9. **How often is your recycling picked up?** Daily – 7. Three times per week – 4. Twice per week – 5. Once per week – 16. Do not recycle – 35.
10. **What is the current cost for your recycling disposal?** No responses received.
11. **When does your current contract with your recycling hauler end?** There were no meaningful responses.
12. **Do you have space on your premises, indoors or out, to store a provided 96, 64, or 35 gallon trash can that could be used for daily or frequent curbside recycling pick up?** Yes – 38. No – 23. No response – 6.
13. **How would you like recycling handled in he downtown area?** Twenty-nine respondents said they would like the Town to arrange recycling downtown, and three said they would not like to have curbside recycling downtown. Thirty-five gave no response.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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THOUGHTS GENERATED FROM THIS SURVEY

1. The problems and solutions involved in the collection of refuse and recyclables seem to be inextricably linked.
2. In the future, if recyclables were to be **uniformly** collected in downtown Blacksburg, we suspect that this would vastly reduce the quantity of refuse discarded in addition to saving landfill space and preserving large quantities of valuable materials for reuse.
3. At the present time, there seems to be more **vehicles** involved in downtown refuse collection than is needed. The present system appears to be very inefficient. Multiple vehicles adds to downtown congestion, wastes fuel, and creates more exhaust emissions than is needed.
4. When we compare the **costs** of refuse collection with charges imposed by other communities (*see separate Benchmark surveys*), the costs to downtown businesses in Blacksburg seem excessive. We suspect that refuse-removal costs could be reduced in the future by increasing the amount of recycling and having one uniform system for removal.
5. The establishment of a uniform, efficient, and cost effective system for handling refuse and recyclables in downtown Blacksburg will not be without its **problems**. Chief among these may be how to properly train employees to separately and effectively handle refuse and recyclables. It is conceivable that *Sustainable Blacksburg* members could work with store managers in the future to effectively train new employees and/or review handling procedures with established workers.