

Key West Aims to Recycle More (and Pay Less)

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As a 6-square-mile island with more than 2 million visitors annually, Florida's southernmost tourist mecca, Key West, faces special challenges in managing more than 50,000 tons of solid waste and recyclables each year.

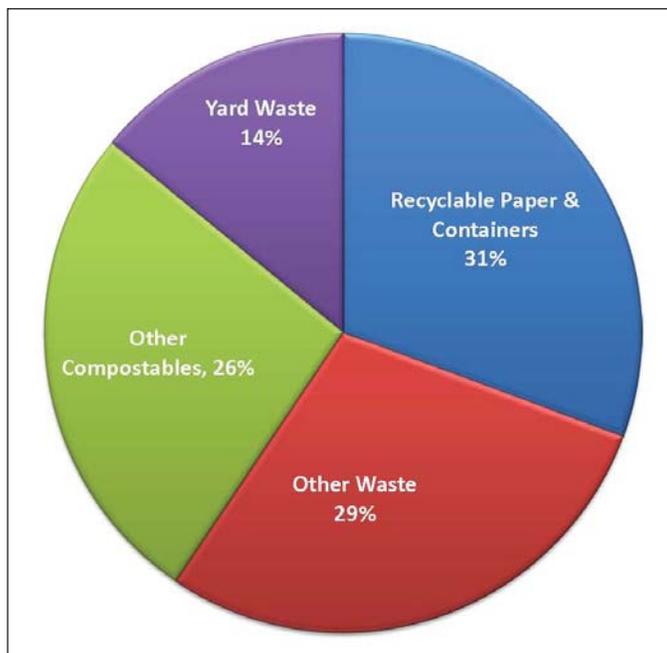
Transporting trash 180 miles to dispose of it in a waste-to-energy plant is expensive. Every ton of waste diverted from disposal saves the city more than \$70, yet the city recycles only about 10 percent of its trash.

On August 29, Key West's city commissioners took a giant step toward a more sustainable community by approving a Solid Waste Master Plan developed by Kessler Consulting, Inc. (KCI). The commission also adopted a ten-point policy statement and committed to hiring a full-time recycling program manager.

The city contracted KCI to develop a plan to help meet the state's 75 percent recycling goal and go even beyond to zero waste. First, we analyzed the city's solid waste contracts; waste generated by its businesses and 24,650 residents; and transfer station

operations.

Given the lush vegetation in Key West, it was no surprise that yard waste makes up 14 percent of the waste disposed. However, easily recyclable materials such as paper and containers comprised 31 percent and



Composition of Waste Disposed

other compostable materials another 26 percent. All totaled, more than 70 percent of waste currently disposed could be recycled or composted.

The challenge is implementing policies and programs to encourage residents, businesses, and tourists to participate. We joined city staff

in soliciting input from interested stakeholders, including elected officials, Chamber of Commerce, Sustainability Advisory Board, service providers and citizens.

In the end, we recommended a three-phase strategy that first targets 25 percent, then progresses up to 75 percent recycling. Key West is moving forward with implementing phase 1, which includes weekly (instead of twice per week) garbage collection; recycling carts; segregated yard waste collection; sharing in recycling revenue; expanding recycling programs for multifamily residents and businesses; and establishing a Green City Program to encourage recycling and environmentally friendly practices at city facilities.

According to the city's Utilities Manager, Jay Gewin, "We're eager to implement the Phase I recommendations, which will help put Key West on the path toward a more sustainable future."

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