

Food Waste Collection Companies Grow With The Flow

Interviews with haulers yield valuable insights into how to successfully set up and run dedicated organics collection routes.

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E.O.M.S. has over 300 food waste collection accounts. Customers use 64-gallon carts and/or 2- and 4-cubic yard containers (photo above).

On October 1, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts' ban on landfill disposal of commercial organics from establishments generating one ton or more of food waste per week goes into effect. On the front lines of helping these businesses and institutions comply are organics haulers, many of whom have been offering their services for years. "Seven years ago, we were servicing about two dozen customers with organics collection," notes Andy Marhoffer of E.O.M.S. Recycling in West Bridgewater, Massachusetts. "Then about three years ago, this division of our trash and recycling collection company started taking off. Today, we have over 300 food waste collection accounts. And with the disposal ban going into effect on October 1, our phone has been ringing off the hook."

To gain insight on a variety of factors critical to collection of source separated commercial organics, BioCycle interviewed haulers in Massachusetts, South Carolina and Virginia. Questions focused on containers, route density, distance to processors and the collection vehicles.

E.O.M.S.

When BioCycle profiled E.O.M.S. Recycling in the August 2007 issue ("Planet Police Routes Out The Heavy Organics"), founder Louis Tarentino explained that the company began food waste collection as an add-on to its recycling services — primarily to lower customers' trash disposal fees. "The restaurants were saying that their trash rates were outrageous, and a lot higher than that of the retail store next door," said Tarentino. "They were questioning why they were paying so much more." He explained to his customers that trash haulers use a formula to set their fees, which is based in part on what industry the business is in, and the average weights for that type of business. That formula uses heavier weights for restaurants than for retail stores or offices. "It sounded to me like there was a need for a food waste collection service," he noted.

E.O.M.S. Recycling rolled out its food waste collection program in February 2007, forming a subsidiary called Planet Police. (That name is no longer used.) It initially targeted existing bakery and food manufacturing customers, providing either front load dumpsters in two, four and six cubic yard (cy) sizes, or 2-wheeled 64-gallon totes. E.O.M.S. purchased a Peterbuilt side loader truck to service the route. "Today, our clients include colleges, private and public schools, cafeterias at large corporations and institutions, restaurants and independent and chain grocery stores," notes Marhoffer, a sales manager. "We focused on downtown Boston to build route density, and then have been moving out to the suburbs as well. Collection service is offered five days a week."

The company collects both pre and postconsumer food waste, with and without compostable products. Not all of the composting facilities it uses accept compostable products. When

feasible, E.O.M.S. will create a route for food waste with compostables, directing those loads accordingly. “For example, some of the colleges and private schools are doing all back of the house and front of the house food waste, and putting everything, including compostable products, in one container,” explains Marhoffer. “We make sure the truck servicing that route is going to a facility that accepts compostable products.”

One lesson learned from the earlier years of collecting food waste is to try to avoid use of 6-cy containers, as well as 96-gallon wheeled totes. “Those just get too heavy,” he adds. “Most of the supermarkets we service are using 2-cy or 4-cy containers; a few use compactors. While we make recommendations to our clients with regards to space considerations, we leave it up to them to choose. Some larger generators prefer totes versus the 2- or 4-cy containers because they can wheel them into the cafeteria or supermarket to fill. We do sell compostable BioBags to customers to line their totes. The price has really come down since we first started, as has the price of the serviceware.” E.O.M.S. does not offer a cart washing service. Customers are responsible for maintaining the totes.

Both rear load and front load Mack trucks are used for food waste collection. While the front-loading trucks also service the recycling routes, the rear load trucks are strictly used for food waste, says Marhoffer. “Those are custom-made for that purpose. They are completely sealed. There is so much weight on these vehicles, and they are on the road 12 to 14 hours a day. Given that wear and tear, we do a fair amount of preventive maintenance — and we go through tires more than other trucks in our fleet.”

Compliance with the Massachusetts commercial organics disposal ban will be monitored and enforced at solid waste facilities. The Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MADEP) and RecycleWorks, its outreach and education contractor, have been actively working with generators to set up source separation programs. “We have been fielding a lot of phone calls and questions,” notes Marhoffer, “and we anticipate getting calls from inspectors about loads arriving at transfer stations and landfills that contain a lot of food waste. We expect we will be getting more customers soon.”

(Please note: This article was edited to only include the content featuring EOMS Recycling)