

PAY-BY-BAG

Frequently Asked Questions…and Answers

Q: What is Pay-By-Bag?

A: Pay-By Bag (PbB) is a system by which you pay for the trash you discard. **There is no charge for recycling (current recycling rules and charges remain in force).** Individuals pay only for their own trash disposal, not that of others. Businesses pay the cost of their trash disposal as well. The fundamental principle involved is that people are responsible for their own trash disposal costs and that, since recycling is free, a PbB system creates a financial incentive to recycle.

Q: What are the benefits of implementing a PbB program?

A: The benefits are twofold: economic and environmental. Trash disposal costs are substantial. Recycling saves on trash disposal costs and generates revenue, thus saving tax dollars. Environmentally, less waste results in less toxic ash and less air pollution as by-products of incineration, the method by which we dispose of our trash. Additionally, recycling saves valuable resources and reduces energy consumption, thus resulting in the production of fewer greenhouse gases that contribute to climate change and threaten our environment.

Q: How does PbB provide a more equitable solution to trash disposal?

A: Before the system was put in place, the cost of solid waste disposal is paid for by local property taxes. Residents can throw away as much as they like, and the entire cost must be covered by this tax. Under our current solid waste management program, residents who throw away less trash subsidize those who throw away greater amounts of trash. There is little incentive to conserve when others in town help subsidize wasteful practices. Under PbB, these costs are covered by a per-bag payment, and **there is no fee for recycling**, so PbB provides an economic incentive to residents to reduce their trash volume and recycle more. Experience in other towns shows that PbB increases recycling.

Q: Won't I be paying twice for trash collection -- once through taxes and again when I buy PbB bags?

A: Yes, but only from September 1, 2010 through December 31, 2010. During this transition period, residents will be paying taxes and buying designated bags. As of January 1, 2011, taxes for the operation of the transfer station will begin to be reduced by proceeds from the bag sales. Proceeds from bag sales will go to support only waste management and will not become part of the general fund. Any waste management expenses not covered by revenue from the bags will be covered by general taxation.

Q: Why shouldn't I get as many free services as possible from the Town?
A: Town services are never 'free'; you pay for them through your property tax. The idea that trash disposal is or ever was 'free' is an illusion resulting from the fact that disposal costs are incorporated in the tax bill. PbB is merely a shift in the way people pay for trash disposal. **It is *not* an added fee. Revenue from bag sales will go into a special account to offset the taxes currently paid for trash disposal.** One of the reasons that PbB works is that it makes it clear to everyone that trash disposal costs money.

Q: Since all taxpayers subsidize schools whether or not they have children in the schools, why shouldn't all taxpayers subsidize trash collection even if they aren't generating much trash?
A: Most taxpayers are willing to subsidize education because they feel that it's in the public interest. But generating more trash is not in the public interest -- quite the opposite. PbB strikes a balance between taxpayer subsidy and user per-bag payments.

Q. How much do the bags cost?
A. The price of a 33-gallon bag is $1.25. A 13-gallon bag costs $0.75. Bags are sold in rolls of 5 at the following locations:

- Colonial Village, 54 Park Avenue, Contoocook
- Mr. Mike's, 891 Main Street, Contoocook
- Aubuchon Hardware, Route 103, Warner
- Concord Hannaford's Supermarkets, 73 Fort Eddy Road,
- Concord Shaw's Supermarket, 20 Fort Eddy Road, Concord
- Town Hall and Town Clerk's Office

Q: How much and how often can the fee be raised?
A: Bag fees will not exceed the cost for the collection, management and disposal of residential solid waste. We are currently paying those costs through our property taxes. PbB will simply change the manner in which those costs are distributed and assessed. The town's overall cost will decrease as trash volume decreases and recycling increases, resulting in a net savings to the taxpayers as a whole. In accordance with the approved warrant article, bag fees will be evaluated at Town Meeting.

Q: How do we know that PbB will reduce trash volume and increase recycling?
A: According to the EPA, the average waste reduction reported by PbB communities is between 25% and 45%.

Q: Will PbB result in problems with illegal dumping?
A: Experience has shown that any increase in illegal dumping is negligible and short-lived, if it occurs at all. Enforcement of littering laws will address illegal dumping.

Q: Do people in other communities like PbB?
A: In every community where PbB is proposed, there are residents who are certain they won't like the program. But once residents see the program in action, it receives strong support from a majority of people, largely because of its cost savings and inherent fairness.

Q: How do we know that PbB won't be overly complicated or inconvenient?
A: A PbB program will be easy to understand and use. Specially marked PbB trash bags are available at various stores, including Colonial Villager, Cracker Barrel, Mr. Mike's, Concord Cooperative Market, Shaw's, and Hannaford's on Fort Eddy Road in Concord and Aubuchon Hardware in Warner. During the first month of the program, bags will also be available at the Town Clerk's office. After the program begins on September 1, 2010, only trash in PbB bags will be accepted. Again, **there will be no change in the way recyclables are treated**. They will not need to be put in PbB bags. They are recycled at no cost. Additionally, certain bulky items that would be difficult and costly to put in PbB bags and that are only occasionally disposed of (such as Styrofoam packing that comes with large electronic items) will be taken at no charge. Common sense and reasonableness will assure that the program is implemented fairly.

Q: Will PbB benefit senior citizens?
A: Since senior citizens tend to have very modest trash output, they are currently subsidizing other households. Many senior citizens will see their trash disposal expenses go down with PbB, since they will come closer to paying only for the limited services they require.

Q: Won't PbB impose an unfair burden on low-income residents?
A: No. Low-income residents will also share in the overall savings achieved by PBB, and because PbB restores some measure of individual control over the trash bill, households that need to economize are given the option to do so. On balance, PbB is advantageous to low-income households. Additionally, subsidies will be made available through the Human Services Department. Low-income families who qualify for assistance will be provided with a certain number of bags at no charge or for a reduced fee. Generally, this number would be based on the average number used by a family of the same size that recycles.

Q: Will PbB be unfair to large families?
A: Opportunities to reduce waste are available to all households (recycling, composting, etc.), and those who limit their waste can get control over a bill they previously could not reduce. Although there is some relationship between family size and amount disposed, all households have opportunities to reduce. In most communities, large households do not generally receive discounts on water service, groceries, or other services that might also vary by family size. Trash output is correlated more with rising income and lifestyle choices than family size. The amount of unavoidable trash generated by larger families is not great enough to impose a hardship. In fact, if a family is careful with its trash, even large families can realize a net savings under PbB.

Q: I live in an apartment building where trash is disposed of in a Dumpster. Will I need to use town bags?
A: Yes. Those residing in apartment buildings, condominiums and other multi-unit dwellings must dispose of their trash in town bags.

Q: My mobile home park has curbside pickup for trash. Should I be using town bags?
A: Yes, as with single-family homes, residents in mobile home or other park/association settings are also required to use town bags.

Q: Will those living in multi-unit dwellings (apartments, condominiums, etc.) and park/association settings have opportunities to recycle?
A: Yes. Residents can always take their recyclables to the Transfer Station free of charge. They may also want to check with their landlords or property managers to see if arrangements have been made for recycling at their locations.

Q: What about people who currently use barrels instead of bags?
A: All trash must be in a PbB bag. You may place the filled PbB bag in a barrel to protect it from wildlife while waiting for pickup.

Q: What about really big items like refrigerators, TVs and furniture?
A: Bulky items will continue to be dealt with as they are now. TV sets and computer monitors are currently recycled. Items such as refrigerators, freezers, furniture, carpet, and tires will be handled under the stipulations of the current policy, as will building materials and hazardous waste.

Q: Will PbB cause residents to use more plastic bags in setting out trash? If so, isn't this an environmental problem?
A: Under PbB, some residents will use more bags, but many will use fewer. This occurs because, under PbB, residents tend to put more trash in each bag, and as recycling increases, trash bag use decreases. We are not yet sure how PbB will affect the total number of bags used. Since a typical trash bag weighs about 1 ounce, this is relatively insignificant compared to the significant tonnage reduction expected from PbB.

Q: How sturdy are the bags?
A: The bags are 1.5 millimeters thick which is almost twice the thickness of a regular kitchen garbage bag, and heavier than most 33-gallon bags found in grocery stores. The bag manufacturer makes bags for many of the PbB programs across the country, which would not be the case if there were quality problems with the bags. The 13-gallon bag is rated for 20 pounds and the 33-gallon bag is rated for 35 pounds.

Q: What do I need to know about sorting my recyclables?
A: Recyclables must be sorted as follows: Plastics – separate by the number on the bottom of the bottle; separate into three categories: #1 bottles and jugs, #2 bottles and jugs, and # 3 - #7s and non-recyclable #1 and #2 containers. Cans – separate aluminum cans from steel cans, no need to remove labels. Paper – all clean paper (office paper, newspaper, catalogs, magazines, mail, phone books, cereal and other cardboard food and non-food boxes, paper towel rolls, etc.) can be recycled together. If it tears, it can be recycled. Corrugated cardboard (cartons and packing boxes, etc.) – separate from other materials. ***Paper and cardboard should be kept dry if left on the curb for a hauler***. A covered plastic bin or plastic sheeting will accomplish this. Glass – separate from other materials, but there is no need to separate by color. See the recycling brochure for more detailed information.

Q. Why must I separate non-recyclable #3 - #7 and non-recyclable #1 and #2 plastics from my regular trash if they aren't currently being recycled?
A; In response to resident's concerns about having to use town bags to dispose of yogurt and other containers not currently accepted for recycling, the Board of Selectmen voted to collect #3 - #7 plastics and non-recyclable #1 and #2 plastics with recyclables. Please note that until markets become available for these items, they will be processed as regular household trash. Kindly keep these plastics separate from recyclable #1 and #2 plastic bottles and jugs.

Q: Does my hauler recycle?
A: We have been made aware that some hauler plan to recycle and some do not. We are also aware that some haulers that are recycling are not recycling all the items that can be recycled. Please call your hauler to receive information on what they actually will be recycling.

Q: Where can I get more information about the PbB program?
A: Please see the other resources listed on the Pay by Bag program page, including the Pay by Bag ordinance. Feel free to contact the Town Hall at 746-3170 or by e-mailing paybybag@hopkinton-nh.gov or Hopkinton_Recycles@yahoo.com for additional information.