
AUSTIN ANSWERED

Recycling diverts 9% of textiles from dump

By Connor Brown

cbrown@statesman.com

When Simple Recycling's curbside pickup program was introduced in 2016, speculation arose about how it would affect local nonprofits such as Goodwill and the Salvation Army.

In June 2016, Austin approved a 36-month contract with Simple Recycling, an Ohio-based for-profit recycler intended to help Austin achieve its zero-waste goals. The company resells higher-quality textile items to thrift stores and recycles material from unusable items while paying Austin \$20 for every ton of material picked up.

Now, nearly 20 months into the contract, Austin resident Beverly Clark asked our Austin Answered project: "Is the private recycling program making money for Austin? Is it keeping textiles out of landfills?"

According to the most recent report from Austin Resource Recovery, formerly known as Solid Waste Services, Simple Recycling collected 212.27 tons of material during 2017, earning Austin

Answered continued on **B3**

Answered

continued from B1

about \$4,245 over the course of a year.

From the program's start in December 2016 to January 2018, Simple Recycling has collected about 284,728 total tons, accounting for nearly 9 percent of textiles previously estimated to have been sent to landfills per year by Austin Resource Recovery customers.

All curbside customers who receive trash and recycling services from Austin Resource Recovery have access to services from Simple Recycling.

Austin Resource Recovery currently services about 198,181 households but does not provide curbside services to commercial properties, private subdivisions, or multifamily units larger than a fourplex.

According to Austin Resource Recovery, Simple Recycling collects clothing or household items every other week. Customers are



WHAT DO YOU WONDER ABOUT?

Ask us anything, and check out the other questions we've answered, at statesman.com/austinanswered.

asked to put out their collection bags on the same day as their regularly scheduled recycling pickup.

Projections for growth in Austin Resource Recovery's service base are unclear, but any increase in the number of households serviced is due to either newly annexed neighborhoods or new housing developments within the city of Austin.

Local nonprofits initially took issue with the contract, arguing that the new curbside program would divert donations away from them.

To appease nonprofits, the Austin City Council urged city staffers to keep tabs on whether Simple Recycling is

affecting charities.

According to Valerie Swift, the senior director of community engagement for Goodwill, donations for Goodwill in Central Texas have seen a decrease in rate growth of about 0.32 percent overall since Simple Recycling was introduced.

"This may not seem significant, but it's significant when looking at growth in prior years, which has been as much as 10 percent in the past five years," Swift said. "Our concern is what will the impact be on the future? Will our growth plateau and actually reverse?"

In 2016, Goodwill diverted about 40,000 tons, including 16,000 tons of recycling, from landfills.

Despite complaints from nonprofits, Austin Resource Recovery recommended the continuation of the Simple Recycling project, which is set to end in June 2019 with up to three 12-month extension options.

Contact Connor Brown at 512-445-3619.