Home Composting Education Has Positive Impact on Landfill Costs

**The situation**

Educating consumers in waste reduction practices proved profitable for six counties in Southern Idaho. With new federal landfill regulations in effect, six Southern Idaho counties joined forces to construct Idaho's first Subtitle "D" landfill. UI Extension Educators, in cooperation with the landfill district, conducted consumer education programs in waste reduction during construction of the facility. Early in 1994, plans for a district-wide home composting program were initiated.

**Our response**

The Extension System has identified the waste management issue as a National Initiative. At the local level programming goals and objectives were developed to raise consumer awareness and provide educational programs on waste management issues. In the second year of this waste management education plan home composting was targeted as the educational focus.

**Cooperators and co-sponsors**

An interagency team including SISW Consumer Educator Carrie Stauffer, JoAnn Robbins, Area Extension Horticulturist and Barbara Morales, Extension Textile and Consumer Environment Area Specialist, worked together to design, promote and deliver a home composting program that included compost bin distribution. The Southern Idaho Solid Waste District provided start-up funds and underwrote partial cost of the compost bins.

**Achievements**

Eleven home composting programs were presented in the 6 county area that makes up the Southern Idaho Solid Waste District. Over 1,000 consumers attended the educational program with 900 compost bin kits being sold to program participants. The impact of the compost education and bin distribution program was measured in a survey of 623 program participants. Two hundred and ninety surveys were returned for a rate of 46%. Approximately 50% of those responding reported that they had begun composting and had not composted before attending the program. Ninety-six percent of those responding to the survey were still using their compost bin at the time of the survey.

The average American household generates 20.8 cubic yards of waste per year, or .4 cubic yard per week.
During the six month period from April to October, 1994, program participants reported a 26% decrease in the volume of their household and yard waste going to the landfill due to their composting activity. Based on these figures, 2.8 cubic yards of waste per compost bin was diverted in the six month period. Assuming that all 900 compost bins were in use, 2,520 cubic yards (1,980 tons) of waste per year has been, or will be, diverted from the landfill.

The average cost of hauling waste materials in Southern Idaho Solid Waste District is $27.50 per ton. By reducing the amount of waste hauled avoided costs over a one year period will be $51,975. In the first year of the program a 2:1 benefit to expense ratio was realized.

**The future**

UI Extension Educators and the Southern Idaho Solid Waste Consumer Educator will work together to continue waste management education in the Magic and Wood River Valleys. Home composting programs will be presented again in the Spring of 1995, with the distribution of 1,000 compost bin kits.

**For more information**

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