HOW ARR STREAMLINED AUSTIN'S UNIVERSAL RECYCLING ORDINANCE REPORTING

AUSTIN RESOURCE RECOVERY

OVERVIEW

Austin Resource Recovery (ARR), a City of Austin service, provides a wide range of services designed to transform waste into resources while keeping the community clean. The City of Austin has committed to becoming a zero waste city by 2040, which means reducing the amount of materials sent to landfills by 90 percent.

In 2012, Austin's City Council passed the Universal Recycling Ordinance (URO) to increase the life of local landfills, reduce harmful environmental impacts, and encourage economic development. Under the ordinance, property owners must ensure recycling services are available to tenants and employees. The five required materials include: plastics #1 and #2 containers, mixed paper (includes office paper, mail, magazines, catalogs), cardboard (includes boxboard and corrugated cardboard), glass beverage containers, and aluminum cans.

In addition, affected properties must pair every exterior trash container with a recycling container within 25 feet. As an educational requirement, signage must be displayed in English and Spanish with graphics to inform employees and residents about recycling options. By February 1st of each year, property owners must submit an annual diversion plan to the City that describes the trash and recycling services and education offered at the property. In the future, properties with a food service permit will be expected to provide diversion programs for food scraps and other organic materials.

INCREASED EFFICIENCY

ENHANCED COMMUNICATION

SAVES TIME

The Challenge

Prior to implementing Re-TRAC Connect™, Austin collected data using an online, text-based form. From there, the data was dropped into multiple Excel spreadsheets which served as the program's database. This method was time-intensive due to the fact that staff had to organize, sort, and analyze the data before it was ready to report to management and ARR's advisory council.

The online form had a limited capacity for data entry. It had no means of validating the data which meant that fields requiring a number-only response contained, for example, the word "six" instead of the number "6". The text-only fields were similarly affected. This required significant staff time to review the data, contact the customer, and correct the responses.

The spreadsheets Austin used to manage the data did not have pre-built calculations and offered no method to compare year-to-year performance. The property owners (end-users) had no password protection, no way to save their data before submitting, and no way to easily review the previous year's responses. Austin needed a way to deliver and manage the URO compliance program more efficiently.

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In order to reduce the workload placed on staff, increase efficiency, and better serve the public, the City initiated a Request for Proposal (RFP). The RFP sought to find a contractor capable of designing, developing, and maintaining a robust cloud-based data management system. The system had to offer web-based reporting forms that could accommodate multi-user access, standardized reporting, and on-demand data analysis and reporting capabilities.

The system needed to provide 30,000 users with unique login credentials and maintain more than 100 data fields for over 30,000 properties. Anticipating future growth and greater capacity, Austin needed a scalable solution that was capable of accommodating new data collection and analysis opportunities.

The Solution

Austin learned about Re-TRAC by attending industry events such as the USZWBC Annual Conference, SWANA's Annual Conference, the Resource Recycling Annual Conference, and STAR's Annual Recycling Summit. Austin's administrators also subscribed to the Re-TRAC Connect Monthly Update email which highlighted how other customers were using the software to achieve their diversion goals.

Emerge Knowledge, the company that developed Re-TRAC Connect, registered as a vendor and received a copy of the RFP when it was formally solicited. At the close of the RFP, Austin reviewed and scored each submission to determine which proposal offered the best solution.

Emerge Knowledge was selected as the top vendor so the company worked with Austin Resource Recovery to develop an implementation plan to get the system up and running.

RE-TRAC CONNECT SELECTED AS TOP BID IN AUSTIN'S RFP PROCESS.

The Results

Austin Resource Recovery's Business Outreach Team now saves a great deal of time by using Re-TRAC. They have eliminated the need to manage multiple spreadsheets or create complex reporting macros.

They are now able to focus their time on providing businesses with the technical resources they need to optimize their recycling programs. Re-TRAC Connect empowers ARR staff to manage property contacts, mailings, questions, observations and compliance actions all in one place. For example, all waiver requests and communication logs are managed in Re-TRAC Connect which makes it easy for City staff to quickly check the status of any property.

WAIVER REQUESTS

When a property has challenges implementing the URO recycling requirements, the owner must submit a waiver request as part of the Annual Diversion Plan (ADP). Once received, City staff reviews the request and decides to:

A. Accept the request and confirm the property is in compliance with the Universal Recycling Ordinance.

B. Reject the request and flag the property for potential deficiencies. The property owner will then be required to make changes to their diversion plan which will be reviewed again in 30 days.

C. If deficiencies aren't addressed after a minimum of three written notices, the property is transferred to Austin Code Department for enforcement.

COMMUNICATION LOG

Austin Resource Recovery's program managers and property owners (end-users) can access the communication log to review a property's current compliance status. The communication logs are used to document actions including waiver reviews, compliance site visits, and compliance mailings.

ELIMINATED THE NEED TO MANAGE MULTIPLE SPREADSHEETS OR CREATE COMPLEX REPORTING MACROS

Quick Facts

AUSTIN'S EXPANSION PLAN FOR MULTIFAMILY PROPERTIES:

Dwelling Units	≥ 50	≥ 25	≥ 10	≥ 5	All
Recycling	Oct. 1 2013	Oct. 1 2014	Oct. 1 2015	Oct. 1 2016	Oct. 1 2017

AUSTIN'S EXPANSION PLAN FOR COMMERCIAL (NON-RESIDENTIAL) PROPERTIES:

Sq. Ft	≥ 75,000*	≥ 50,000	≥ 25,000	≥ 5,000	All
Recycling	Oct. 1 2013	Oct. 1 2014	Oct. 1 2015	Oct. 1 2016	Oct. 1 2017
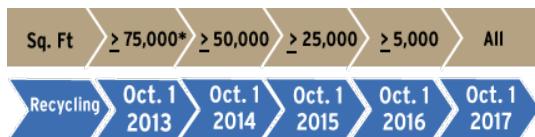
AUSTIN'S ORGANICS DIVERSION EXPANSION PLAN FOR BUSINESSES WITH A FOOD SERVICE PERMIT:

Permitted area (Sq. Ft.)	≥ 15,000	≥ 5,000	All Businesses
Organics Diversion	Oct. 1 2016	Oct. 1 2017	Oct. 1 2018

MANY OF AUSTIN'S SINGLE-STREAM RECYCLING HAULERS ALSO INCLUDE THESE MATERIALS WHEN REPORTING:

- Plastics #3 - #7
- Hard or Rigid Plastics
- Aluminum Foil and Trays
- Steel and Tin Cans
- Non-Ferrous Metals

"Re-TRAC Connect provides City of Austin staff with real-time reports, anytime online access for customers, and results in increased transparency for businesses. Austin uses Re-TRAC Connect, a cloud-based software system, to input, consolidate, and share important recycling and diversion information with stakeholders in our community."

- Aiden Cohen, Program Manager
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