

# Waste Management

*Recycling Behavior Study sets the stage for future programs*



In 2013 Waste Management partnered with King and Snohomish Counties to gain a better understanding of how residents are recycling and how to best educate and encourage them to recycle more. In order to do so, the team implemented a comprehensive residential recycling behavior study with households in the WUTC areas of King and Snohomish Counties.

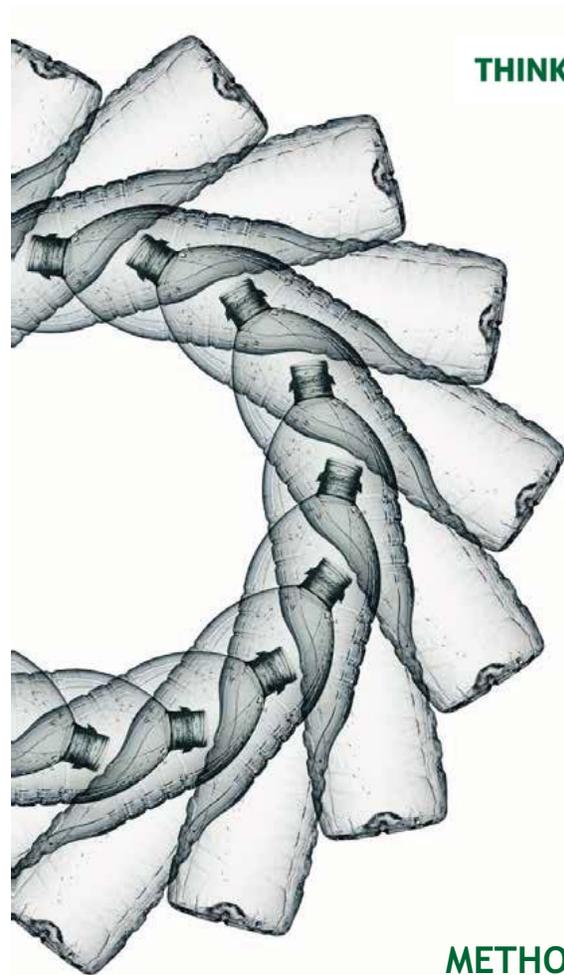
As is the case with many jurisdictions across the state and country, in King and Snohomish Counties, a lot is known about what's in the residential waste stream through waste characterization studies. However, little is known about why and how it ended up there. Past phone surveys and focus groups yielded some insights, but the results weren't statistically significant and have contained a degree of self-reporting bias.

This new study revealed more information than any previous study.

The Waste Management Behavior Study is a model for how other jurisdictions can approach efforts at changing recycling behaviors in their own communities. Measuring what residents are throwing away and correlating to what is motivating them or hindering them from recycling more, will lead to more strategic and purposeful marketing and outreach campaigns. Furthermore, conducting a study like this before implementing community initiatives provides the opportunity to measure the results of the campaign.

## GOALS

- Identify baseline recycling behaviors to allow for tracking change over time
- Identify values, attitudes and beliefs related to recycling and the value of recycling
- Identify barriers and effective motivations to achieve desired behavior changes
- Identify the most effective communications tools to achieve desired behavior changes



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## METHODOLOGY

Waste Sorts of Garbage Carts at 411 homes



Followed by 225 follow-up in-person surveys conducted door-to-door



Following the Behavior Study, Waste Management conducted a separate focus group effort to dive deeper into some of the findings from the study. Focus group participants completed a recycling journal over the course of five days prior to the focus group participation to gauge their own recycling behaviors.

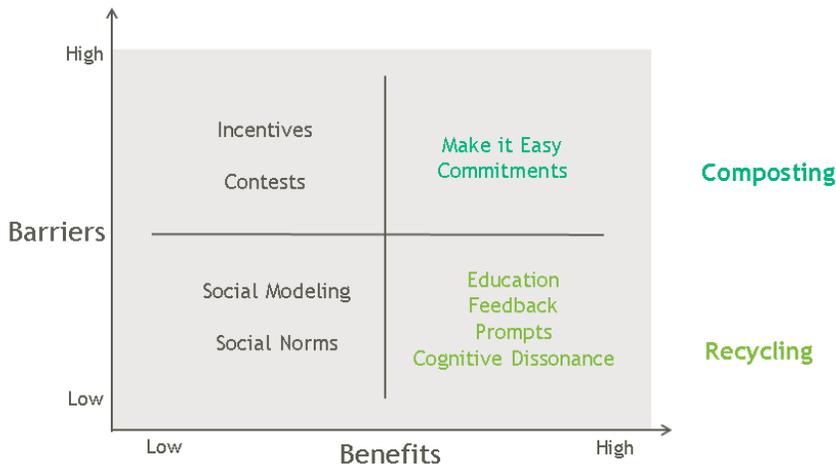
## KEY FINDINGS

- People believe recycling is “very important” and believe it’s “not at all difficult” (with the exception of food scraps and food-soiled paper), yet lots of recyclables are found in their garbage.
- Although residents said recycling is important and that they recycle most of the time, 98 percent of households had at least one type of recyclable material in their trash.

ATTITUDES	BARRIERS TO RECYCLING	BARRIERS TO COMPOSTING	COOPERATION
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People care</li> <li>• Recycling was important and not difficult (with the exception of food scraps and food-soiled paper)</li> <li>• Believe they are doing a good job</li> <li>• Unsure about composting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Still putting recyclables in the garbage</li> <li>• Confusion about prep and what can be recycled</li> <li>• Don’t understand recycling process</li> <li>• Old recycling rules still in play</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of system</li> <li>• Inconvenience, laziness, worry about smell or mess</li> <li>• Don’t understand value of curbside composting</li> <li>• Some people will never compost</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 30% stated no one in the household was uncooperative</li> <li>• 56% stated kids were least cooperative</li> <li>• Tendency to blame others</li> </ul>

## BEHAVIOR CHANGE TOOLS

Tools that leverage high motivations (recycling was very important) and low barriers (not difficult to do) are likely to be effective



From Schultz (2013). Strategies for promoting pro-environmental behavior: Lots of tools but few instructions. Used by permission of the author.

## TOP 4 RECYCLABLES FOUND IN THE TRASH

1. Food scraps and food-soiled paper
2. Mixed paper such as junk mail, magazines, food and detergent boxes
3. Plastics such as water bottles, yogurt and shampoo containers
4. Polycoated containers such as ice cream, soy milk and juice boxes

