

Best Practice: Swap Shops: A Cost Effective Residential Reuse Program

Jurisdiction: Chatham County

Brief Description: Swap Shops are set up for citizens to drop off items they no longer need but are still useful. Other citizens pick up items they want from the Swap Shop, such as furniture, clothing, books, tools, and other household items. Swap Shops are located at staffed collection centers where people are already bringing their garbage and recyclables. The Swap Shops are not intended to be a charity service that reserves items for the most needy in the community. Items are available on a first come, first serve basis, and collection center attendants do not monitor who takes items.

Background/Findings/Goal: Swap Shops are set up to keep reusable materials out of the landfill. Waste reduction is the first priority. For a small investment, communities can construct Swap Shops that pay for themselves in a short time through avoided tip fees. Citizens appreciate a convenient place to reuse items and Swap Shops are frequently the most popular component of a collection center.

Ordinance/Policy: NA

Implementation Details: Chatham County has Swap Shops at all 12 staffed collection centers. They are three-sided sheds with a roof that have been framed out of wood. The Swap Shops sit on a concrete pad and measure 10 ft. x 13 ft. Shelves, hooks, and rods are used to hang clothing and display items. Chatham County's Swap Shops were constructed for between \$2,000 and \$3,000 per building (including lumber, concrete pad, shingles, and labor). Collection Center attendants generally spend 5% of their time monitoring and maintaining the Swap Shops. They make sure items are reusable and not dangerous. Originally, electronic devices were not allowed in Swap Shops, but the issuance of signs (drafted by County Attorney) waiving liability for County and the staffing contractor now makes it possible to include those items.

Results: It is estimated that over 70% of what goes into the Swap Shops is reused, and the rest eventually is thrown away. A survey conducted at the collection centers showed that 87% felt the Swap Shops were a valuable service. The estimated diversion from Swap Shops has increased from under 25 tons the first year to over 400 tons in Fiscal Year 1999-2000. There are 12 centers and they get different amounts of usage.

Next Steps/Future Plans/Collateral Practices: Future plans include a promotional campaign, attendant training to increase diversion to the Swap Shops, and new shelves and signs for the buildings.

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