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Lee County launches “Recycle Smart” education campaign

FORT MYERS, FL, June 30, 2016 – Lee County Solid Waste today announced the launch of a recycling education initiative, “Recycle Smart – Five for the Cart,” to reduce the amount of trash in the recycle stream.

“Lee County residents are enthusiastic recyclers – currently number one in the state,” said Keith Howard, Division director. “However, misconceptions about what material is appropriate for curbside recycling has led to more and more trash in recycle carts.”

Non-recyclable materials in the carts has risen from 9 percent to about 15 percent in the last four years, with an accompanying disposal cost of roughly \$25,000 monthly, according to Solid Waste data. Larger, wheeled recycling carts were distributed during that time in a successful effort to help Lee County meet Florida’s statewide recycling goal of 75 percent by 2020. Unfortunately, the amount of non-recyclables included in the carts increased from an average of 655 tons per month to over 1,000 tons monthly.

The Recycle Smart campaign simplifies the recycling message and uses multiple communication channels, including a series of short informational videos, new brochures and magnets for home use, one-on-one education and an increased presence at local events. The county is also launching an interactive quiz at www.leegov.com/solidwaste/quiz that will give residents immediate feedback on whether their recycling choices pass the “recycle smart” test.

The five materials that go into carts are paper, metal cans, cardboard, plastic containers identified with #1 through #7, and glass bottles and jars.

Material staff is seeing in the recycling stream that should not be there include garden hoses, ropes and other string-like things, pool covers, clothing, small appliances, rotting food and lots of plastic bags.

The 24-month Recycle Smart campaign will launch July 1 to full-time residents followed by a secondary push in January targeting seasonal residents. Solid Waste staff will perform quarterly calculations to determine the reduction of non-recyclables in the carts.

“We are confident that when Lee County residents have better information we’ll see that reflected in their recycle carts,” Howard said.

About the Solid Waste Division

The Lee County Solid Waste Division is a nationally-recognized enterprise system providing residents and businesses safe, affordable waste disposal and recycling services. The system utilizes an energy-from-waste combustion process to create clean, renewable energy and single-stream recycling for material recovery. For more information visit our website at www.leegov.com/solidwaste.