

Program Spotlight: City of Concord's In-House Recycling Success

In 2023, the City of Concord received a Community Waste Reduction and Recycling (CWRAR) grant from the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality (NC DEQ) to expand its cart-tagging, outreach, and education efforts. The grant came at a pivotal time for the City, following its transition from contractor-provided solid waste services to an in-house collection program.

The results have exceeded expectations.

From FY23 to FY25, Concord experienced a **58% increase in the total tonnage of residential recycling collected**. The first year of in-house operations saw a remarkable 37% increase, followed by an additional 15% increase in the second year, reflecting steady progress as the program matured. These gains demonstrate not only improved participation but also growing resident understanding of proper recycling practices.

For the first time in recent memory, Concord also saw a reduction in volume of residential waste sent to the landfill. During the most recent fiscal year, **landfill tonnage dropped by five tons**. While modest in scale, this decrease is a significant milestone for one of the fastest-growing cities in North Carolina and underscores the effectiveness of the City's recycling and waste reduction efforts.

Since bringing recycling services in-house, overall contamination has dropped significantly. City staff attribute this improvement to greater program control, targeted education, improved use of data, and—critically—the dedication of engaged drivers and operators. Several collection staff embraced the program as a personal mission, actively reinforcing correct behaviors, identifying issues in the field, and taking pride in the program's success. Their passion and commitment have played a meaningful role in achieving these outcomes.

Another key component of Concord's success has been its growing use of Routeware data. The City actively uses the platform to track issues, identify problem areas, and support education and enforcement efforts. Looking ahead, Concord plans to expand its use of Routeware even further, leveraging data to continue refining operations and improving service quality.

Education has also played a central role in the program's progress. With services brought in-house just a few years ago, Concord invested heavily in direct outreach, including presentations tailored to specific homeowners associations (HOAs). The City has also seen strong results from working with neighborhood ambassador contacts, helping reinforce correct recycling behavior at the community level.

City staff note that one of the greatest benefits of bringing services in-house has been increased control over program quality and customer service. Issues can be addressed more quickly, service expectations are clearer, and educational messaging is better aligned with day-to-day

operations. This direct control has made it easier to deliver consistent, high-quality service while strengthening trust with residents.

Concord's experience demonstrates how **data-driven decision-making, targeted education, engaged frontline staff, and in-house service delivery** can lead to measurable and meaningful improvements. With contamination rates down, recycling tonnage up, landfill disposal declining, and strong momentum across the program, Concord is well-positioned to continue building on this success in the years ahead.

If you have questions or would like to learn more, please reach out to Concord's Solid Waste Services Director Robin Barham at barhamr@concordnc.gov.