Austin’s 2015 Diversion Study

Methodology for measuring diversion in Austin
Austin’s Zero Waste Goal and Milestones

90% Diversion by 2040
Baseline study

• Goals for measuring diversion in Austin
  – Research best practices of other communities
  – Comprehensive approach
  – Capture activities such as Reduction, Reuse, Repurposing

• Goals for future studies
  – Transparency
  – Repeatability
Challenges

• City of Austin directly controls less than 25% of the resource stream
  – Services residential (single family) homes
• Private/Self haulers handle at least 75% of materials generated in Austin
  – Universal Recycling Ordinance (URO) influences market
• Multiple haulers and facilities manage commercial and multifamily waste
  • No City of Austin landfill or MRF
Methodology: Four Pillars

• Comprehensive approach to diversion
  – Data Collection
  – Business Surveys
  – Lid-lifting observations
  – Waste Characterization
Data Collection

• Data from publicly available sources
  – Licensed Hauler Tons
  – URO Annual Diversion Plans
  – City facility and contracts

• Direct outreach to businesses
  – Donation Centers
  – Large Employers
Business Survey

- 3000 randomly selected businesses
- 1,000 follow up calls
- ~3% response rate
Lid-Lifting Observations

Legend

- Field Observation Zone Investigated
Waste Characterizations

- Sorts at 3 landfills, 3 MRFs, observations at 2 compost facilities
- Expanded category list, 30+ material categories
- No control over routes
Success: What worked?

- Met study objectives within budget and schedule
- Built awareness in the community
- Included diversion activities not previously captured
- Foundation for continuous improvement
Success: Methodology

• We have a lot of good data available
• Good response rate for business surveys
• Easy mobile reporting for lid-lifting through Re-Trac
• Laminated labels on bins increased sort efficiency
Lessons Learned

• Statistically significant waste sorts
• Observations are good, but difficult to include in calculations
• Improved survey techniques
Challenges and Next Steps

• How do you measure what isn’t there?
• Real Diversion includes Reduction, Reuse, Repair, not just Recycling
• No standardized way to quantify
Next Steps

• What can we do now to improve the next study
  – Help establish national standards
  – Get systems and processes in place for 2020
  – Is diversion rate the best way to calculate how well we’re doing?
Questions?

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• Diversion Study web page – coming soon!
  • www.austintexas.gov\URO