SUMMARY OF RIDE-ALONG EXPERIENCES

Multifamily route ride-alongs with garbage and recycling haulers in the Metro region

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During the first quarter of the 2017 calendar year, team members from the Multifamily Recycling Project participated in nine different ride-along experiences with garbage and recycling haulers. All routes were within the Metro region and conducted with licensed garbage haulers with prior approval from the hauling company. Garbage and commingle routes were included. Several key themes and issues were revealed. These include driver ingenuity, physical ability and attention to safety; enclosure location, bin signage, and effective communication with property managers or landlords.

Driver ingenuity, physical ability and attention to safety

Driver ingenuity and the physical demands/physical ability of the drivers were at the forefront of most ride-along summaries. The amount of times a driver has to get in and out of the cab to maneuver bins was significantly higher than anticipated. Drivers also use ingenuity, physical ability and attention to safety to move large, full bins over a variety of terrain types, around curbs, cars and other obstacles to allow access to the truck.

It is often necessary for drivers to push or pull bins through puddles, over mud, across gravel, between parked cars, and down narrow hallways (please note, not all bins are fitted with casters or wheels). This has the potential to put a lot of physical strain on their bodies, observations repeatedly noted drivers using safety protocols. In cases of overflows in bins and bulky waste present in enclosures, there are additional challenges for the drivers to maneuver bins to load into the truck.

Safety appears to be top concern for haulers and their companies. It was observed and noted multiple times the requirements and protocols hauling companies have in place to keep drivers safe. The placement and condition of garbage and recycling bins or their enclosures requires a high level of physical ability and ingenuity from drivers.

Enclosure location

Another area of observation is the placement and condition of bins and/or enclosures the drivers' need to access to complete their job. Enclosures are often placed in the back of a property or parking area, leading drivers to maneuver their trucks, often in reverse, around parked vehicles, corners or down narrow alleys and backing onto major streets. The location of the garbage and recycling enclosures can make it very difficult for the trucks, both those with forks and arms, to efficiently and completely empty the containers. Maneuvering the full bins around parking barriers, down loading docks, and around other property structures such as stairs, multiple locked doors or sliding gates tests the drivers' ingenuity to efficiently, effectively and safely complete their job.

Similarly, bins that are locked when not expected to be or vice versa can also usurp valuable time. Project team members noted the massive key rings, lists of key codes and handfuls of FOBs some drivers were required to have to access the bins.

Bin signage

Bin signs and stickers were noted as a two-pronged issue. The first concern was from the perspective of driver use and needs. When decals and labels on the bins are not large or easily seen from the cab of the truck (e.g. in the rain, in the dark, etc) it can be a challenge to know which bin is collecting which material stream. This requires additional trips out of the cab to decipher the bins and labels and reduces efficiency. The second is raised by the drivers on behalf of the residents and customers. They noted contamination is a problem when residents cannot easily tell where bin is garbage or recycling. Some issues widely present are bins with multiple stickers or labels from many eras, language barriers when labels are English-only, and in some cases, a complete lack of signage or stream label.

Effective communication

Another common thread observed during all ride-alongs was how drivers and collection companies communicate any issues with the landlord or property manager. All hauling companies had processes in place to document and communicate with the property owner or manager in the case of issues like contamination. The owner/manager is responsible for on-site garbage and recycling service; effectively communicating with the property owner/managers when problems are persistent is critical, but not simple.

Similarly, drivers noted frustration with the site design or permitting processes. When garbage and recycling service is not fully considered in the planning of properties, the placement of enclosures can cause ongoing service inefficiencies and cause traffic flow problems. Multiple project members noted drivers had to impede traffic in order to empty the containers, keeping their cool and effectively getting their job done in situations where cars may be encroaching. Full parking lots and cars parked in front of enclosures can make pick-up challenging. Drivers expressed a desire to find a better way to suggest changes in service or placement to help with efficiency and contamination.

Conclusion

As the project team considers options for improving multifamily garbage and recycling service, it was critical for team members to observe how the systems performs in collection. Two major stakeholder groups' (multifamily residents and multifamily route drivers) regularly use and access enclosures, and therefore it is critical the enclosures meet the needs of both groups. Many of the team's observations focused on the driver and situational or environmental impediments to the drivers on being able to do their jobs efficiently and effectively. The skill and ability of multifamily route drivers stood out to all project team members.