



Walter Wright, Jr.
wwright@mwlaw.com
(501) 688.8839

Recycling: Northwest Arkansas Democrat Gazette Article Addresses Pulaski County Regional Solid Waste Management District "Single-Stream" Challenges

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The *Northwest Arkansas Democrat Gazette* ("Democrat") published a March 18th article addressing challenges the Pulaski County Regional Solid Waste Management District ("District") and its contractor Waste Management, Inc. ("WM") are addressing because of the conversion to single-stream recycling.

The article notes that the District (which includes Little Rock, North Little Rock, and Sherwood) converted to single-stream recycling in 2012.

Single-stream recycling generally refers to a system in which all recyclables, including newspaper, cardboard, plastic, aluminum, junk mail, etc. are deposited in a single container for recycling. The recyclables are usually collected by a single truck and taken to a facility (sometimes referred to as a Materials Recovery Facility ["MRF"]) to be sorted into various commodity streams for sale for markets. Once the recyclables arrive at the MRF, they are sorted.

Advocates for this system argue that it is a lower-cost alternative to "dual stream" collection and entices more residents to participate in a curbside program.

The *Democrat* article states that contamination has arisen since the District's conversion to a single-stream system, in which residents no longer have to sort recyclables at the curb. Contamination is stated to have been approximately 18% in 2012 and since risen substantially. District officials are referenced as stating that "about 40% of recycling loads are being thrown into the landfill instead of being recycled ..."

"Contamination" refers to any type of material other than the target material (i.e., the desired recyclables). Items such as propane tanks, bowling balls, or manhole covers are stated to have been found in District's recycling bins and necessitated transfer to a landfill as opposed to the MRF.

WM Public-Sector Services Manager, George Wheatley, is stated to have told the District's Board that:

... the company is working on technology that will detect specific households that are contributing contamination.

He also is quoted as stating that:

... starting this summer, truck drivers will have tablets and be able to document each home where they stop and, with some degree help, determine whether that home's recycling bin had contamination in it.

WM is implementing the technology and acquiring the data at no additional cost because its contract with the District has not been amended to include it.

The District is also stated to be addressing the issue by undertaking a study with the University of Arkansas at Little Rock to address contamination issues.

The issue of contamination is presumably exacerbated by the fact that the recycling industry is being buffeted by problems such as increased processing costs and decreased commodity prices.