



Refuse Collection: Issues to Consider

Dear Reader:

The following document was created from the MTAS website ([mtas.tennessee.edu](https://www.mtas.tennessee.edu)). This website is maintained daily by MTAS staff and seeks to represent the most current information regarding issues relative to Tennessee municipal government.

We hope this information will be useful to you; reference to it will assist you with many of the questions that will arise in your tenure with municipal government. However, the *Tennessee Code Annotated* and other relevant laws or regulations should always be consulted before any action is taken based upon the contents of this document.

Please feel free to contact us if you have questions or comments regarding this information or any other MTAS website material.

Sincerely,

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When a private firm is able to undercut a municipality's cost of collection and still earn enough profit to make the contract desirable, it is because the firm has paid attention to the following:

- Proper routing;
- Proper equipment selection;
- Proper staffing;
- Proper training; and
- Economy of scale

These are all items that a municipality can address if the policy decision is made to do so.

Appropriate planning, especially on collection routing, is critical to the municipality's competitiveness. The collection environment should be studied carefully, and suitable vehicles with the correct staffing selected to meet the need. Higher equipment prices and automation, for instance, are not necessarily the answer.

One of the most common problems with competitive residential collection is the over-manning of municipal collection vehicles. Having too many employees lowers individual productivity and increases cost of service.

Preventative maintenance is an area where municipalities must guard against falling short. Solid waste collection equipment is a major capital investment. Successful private sector enterprises recognize this. They also recognize that preventative maintenance programs have proven to more than pay for themselves. Equipment will last longer, allow crews to perform at peak efficiency, and not be subject to costly and annoying down time.

Private firms also recognize the value of accurate record keeping for making sound management decisions. Having complete records aids in route planning, staffing, and equipment selection.

Thorough employee and management training is another key area where cities need to take a note of private firm operations.

Once again, policy decisions come into play, but curbside collection allows the municipality to provide service at the lowest cost to the public. A curbside collection route with bagged garbage can be served by a one-person crew in a dual controlled side loader. Bagged trash in a side loader can cut the collector's steps in half compared to city rollouts or customer containers.

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