

SAVE AS YOU THROW (SAYT)

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Questions have been drawn from public outreach events (booths, meetings and Open House) and emails sent to the Environmental Sustainability Board (ESB@lacnm.us). Sources for answers and additional information on SAYT can be found on our [Resources](#) web page.

GENERAL PROGRAM QUESTIONS

Q: Why is the County considering changing the flat monthly refuse fee to a unit-based, SAYT system?

A: A SAYT system supports Los Alamos County goals of environmental stewardship, sustainability, quality of life, and appropriate levels of county services.

Unit-based rate systems, such as SAYT, charge based on the amount of trash thrown away. Such systems are in use in more than 7,000 communities in the U.S. and offer a number of benefits including:

1. Charge for trash based on use, like other utilities (electricity, water, etc.) and commodities (milk, gasoline).
2. Allow ratepayers to control spending, by controlling the amount of trash they generate.
3. Can reduce trash generation significantly (17-60%), lowering County costs, greenhouse gas generation, and air and water pollution, while preserving landfill space.
4. Can increase recycling and composting significantly, which lowers costs and offers many environmental benefits.

Q: Who would be affected by SAYT?

A: Residents who currently pay a monthly refuse fee on their utility bills. Apartment dwellers, businesses, etc. would not be affected. (Note: these entities already pay a unit-based rate.)

Q: Would the SAYT program be mandatory?

A: Yes. The County Council will have final approval on the solid waste rate structure. If SAYT is adopted by County Council, the program would be implemented county-wide.

Q: How does SAYT work?

A: There are two main approaches available, bags or carts. In either case a flat refuse fee would remain on your monthly bill to cover fixed costs. In addition, residents would pay a unit based cost for the size of roll cart or for the number of bags purchased. Rates have not been determined.

Q: Will SAYT cause more problems with the new Utilities billing system?

A: No. If SAYT were adopted, the new Utilities billing system will be able to accommodate the change.

Q: Are you considering using a weight-based SAYT system here?

A: No, not at this time. Weight-based systems are rare in the U.S., and require expensive equipment upgrades for collection.

Q: What about people who only put out their trash every other week/once a month etc.?

A: As is currently the case, a fixed monthly fee will be charged. Under a cart-based SAYT program, residents will be charged the same rate every month (based on cart size), regardless of collection frequency. Under a bag-based SAYT system, residents pay per bag used, regardless of when it is collected.

Q: If you don't put your trash cart out, can you get a refund from the County?

A: No.

Q: If you are away for several months, would you still have to pay the fixed fee?

A: Yes, just as you do now.

Q: How will SAYT impact students and other seasonal residents?

A: Hosts for summer students should be prepared for variability in their trash stream. Seasonal residents would be charged year-round, as they are now.

Q: Will the County be able to raise the costs of roll carts or bags whenever it wants to under SAYT?

A: No. All changes in rates will go through the public meeting and ordinance procedures currently used for rate changes. Solid waste rates are set/adjusted to cover the cost to provide service to the community.

ROLL CART BASED SAYT

Q: If the roll cart system were chosen, what sizes of roll carts are available?

A: The County currently offers three different trash cart sizes, 48, 64, or 96 gallon. Additional sizes may be added in the future. The County also offers Bear Tough carts in 64 and 96 gallon sizes. Guidelines will be provided to help in selecting the right cart size.

Q: What if I have the smallest cart size and need to upgrade the cart for a temporary period of time?

A: The County can provide cart upgrades or downgrades; a service fee will be assessed after the initial program implementation.

Q: Will a roll cart-based SAYT system cause more people to overstuff their carts, leading to more problems with animals/wind etc. scattering trash?

A: Overstuffing is prohibited by ordinance, and monitored by Environmental Services staff for compliance.

Q: Will a roll cart-based SAYT system result in people putting their trash in their neighbors' bins?

A: This has not been an issue in other communities.

Q: If most residents switch to the smallest cart size (and lowest refuse rate), how would the program cover costs?

A: Differences in rates will be determined by cost to transport and dispose of trash at the landfill. If a smaller cart is used, there is less cost to transport and tip. A flat fee will remain on the monthly bill to cover all other residential services such as 12 loads at the Eco Station, recycle and yard trimming collection.

BAG BASED SAYT

Q: If the bag system was chosen, how does it work?

A: The County would collaborate with local businesses to sell County-approved trash bags to residents. The trash bag would be filled up with garbage and then set in the regular trash roll cart. Cameras on collection trucks (already in use) would allow drivers to ensure that only approved bags are collected.

Q: What would the cost/size of the bags be?

A: Bags are usually offered in 15 and 30 gal. sizes. Although costs haven't been determined, the U.S. average cost per bag is \$1 to \$3 per bag.

Q: What if residents use the wrong trash bag?

A: The County would work diligently to educate residents about the bag program and how to use the program correctly. If the issue is ongoing, the County would work with Code Enforcement to achieve compliance.

OTHER REFUSE SERVICES

Q: Will the County resume weekly collection of recycling under SAYT?

A: Returning to weekly recycling collection will require additional budgetary funding. The need for this schedule will be reviewed by the Environmental Sustainability Board.

Q: Will other services (12 loads, household hazardous waste and electronic disposal, yard trimmings collection) change under SAYT?

A: No.

Q: Will residents maintain 12 loads to the Eco Station each year?

A: Yes, residents will still be able to bring 12 loads of trash to the Eco Station each year as part of their residential refuse service fee.

Q: Will residents still be allowed to donate a load to non-profit thrift shops?

A: Yes, residents will be allowed to donate one load each year to a non-profit thrift shop.

ILLEGAL DUMPING, CONTAMINATION, ETC.

Q: Does illegal dumping increase as a result of SAYT?

A: In most (75%) communities that have adopted a SAYT program, illegal dumping did NOT increase. If illegal dumping does increase, it usually is for a limited and short-term (1-3 months), and subsided with education and enforcement. In addition, residents will retain their 12 loads to the Eco Station. This will help alleviate any additional waste generation.

Q: Will more use of the "12 loads" program lead to more trash along roadways?

A: Current transport of trash etc. to the Eco Station does not produce any detectable amount of litter along roads. It is unlikely that additional use of the program will cause a significant problem.

Q: How can commercial business and apartment complexes avoid the possibility of illegal dumping?

A: The County can provide a locking mechanism on dumpsters to prevent unwanted/illegal dumping at their dumpsters. This service is currently utilized by numerous commercial customers.

Q: Will SAYT cause increased contamination of recycle and/or yard trimming roll carts?

A: It's hard to say. Monitoring, education and enforcement will be used to minimize this problem if it occurs.

MISCELLANEOUS ISSUES

Q: Will residents who voluntarily pick up trash on trails, Scouts who do clean-up projects, etc. have a way to dispose of it for free?

A: In addition to 12 loads per year for each household, the County also hosts an annual clean up event and provides free waste disposal for residents.

Q: Some residents share space in their roll carts with their neighbors. How would SAYT impact them?

A: Under a bag-based system, anyone could use any cart they want, including bear carts, neighbor carts, etc.

Q: I like to use no bag/a particular type of trash bag/reused bags for my trash. Can I keep doing that?

A: By ordinance, all trash must be bagged in roll carts. Under the cart-based SAYT system, any type of bag would be permissible. Under a bag-based system, specific bags would be required.

Q: Is SAYT fair to 1) large families? 2) senior citizens/residents with disabilities? 3) low-income households?

A: All residents have the opportunity to reduce their trash. 12 loads will remain available to all household who pay for curbside collection of trash and recycle. In addition: 1) SAYT rates are based on trash generation, not family size. Currently, households that generate less trash are subsidizing services for households that generate more. 2) & 3) senior citizens and low-income residents typically produce less trash than larger/more affluent households, and may see their rates reduced under SAYT. Senior rates and financial assistance may be available to those in need. Assisted refuse service will continue free of charge.

Q: Can the County reduce trash collection frequency to every other week?

A: No. The County is required by New Mexico Solid Waste Rules to provide solid waste collection services at least once weekly.

Q: What can residents do to reduce their solid waste?

A: Recycling and composting at home can help reduce waste. Preventing waste by buying durable products with less packaging also helps. Please see the Environmental Services website (losalamosnm.us/gogreen) for many other ideas on how to reduce waste.

Q: Do we really want more people composting at home, what with bears and wildlife?

A: Yes! Composting correctly at home does not increase bear issues and can significantly reduce the amount of waste a household generates.

Q: What is the process planned for having SAYT approved and implemented in Los Alamos?

A: The SAYT Research Subcommittee will bring their draft proposal for SAYT to the Environmental Sustainability Board in September 2019, and the ESB will finalize the recommendation in October 2019. Presentation of the recommendation will be made to County Council in November 2019 (all dates are tentative.) The final approval on whether to adopt any of the recommendations for SAYT will be made by the County Council.

Q: I have additional questions/comments, where should I send them?

A: Please email the Environmental Sustainability Board at ESB@lacnm.us