Cities adopt cheaper, single-bin recycling

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An increasing number of U.S. cities are reportedly eliminating the need to separate paper from cans and bottles in favor of single-bin recycling.

The cities say the controversial system increases recycling rates and lowers costs, while critics say it also degrades some of the material being recycled and fails to meet fundamental recycling goals such as saving energy, the Christian Science Monitor reported Wednesday.

Supporters point to Madison, Wis., which started recycling 8,100 more tons of material each week after adopting the new method, while the city's landfill and collection costs decreased.

The single-stream method is now used in about 100 city and regional single-stream programs in 22 states, serving 27 million residents. That compares with 11 states and 16 million residents five years ago, Governmental Advisory Associates, a Westport, Conn., consulting firm told the Monitor.

Unlike the dual-stream approach, in which residents separate cans and bottles from paper, single-stream recycling puts all recyclables into the same bin.

Proponents say the large bin and no separation make recycling simpler, faster, and cheaper, with computer-controlled equipment doing the sorting at the recycling facility.

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