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USA Today: Trash cans dumped for sun-powered compactors

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A growing number of cities and municipalities are testing solar-powered trash compactors as a way to go green and save some green.

Communities in 46 states, as well as some state parks and colleges, are replacing regular trash cans, according to Richard Kennelly, vice president of BigBelly Solar marketing, which manufactures the devices.

Officials in states including California, Arizona and Pennsylvania say the trash compactors save long-term costs by reducing the number of trash pickups. ...

The newer models can send text messages to a central server when the cans are full to "minimize miles" in the trash pickup route, Kennelly says. ...

Pasadena, California, has deployed 12 of the containers over the past two years and bought 40 more in November that will be put in place this year, says Gabriel Silva, public works environmental program manager.

The trash compactors have helped beautify the area, said Gina Tleel, executive director for South Lake Business Association.

When Arizona State University began using the compactors, Refuse Coordinator Ted Woods doubted most students would use them.

"Boy, I had to eat my words, they work great," says Woods, who said the containers have reduced the daily trash pickup to once a week.

The university received six donated compactors from Pepsi in 2006 and added 10 units in 2008, said Bonny Bentzin, director of university sustainability practices.

The compactors were installed at Georgetown University in October 2009, says William del Vecchio, manager of recycling and solid waste disposal at the university.

"Personally, I'm glad to see the university continuing its push for sustainability efforts," said student Calen Angert, who uses the cans.

Student Nora White, who has used the bins on campus at Los Angeles Trade-Technical College, says they are a good reminder to recycle. "With them right beside each other, it puts it in your consciousness," she says.

Some states, including California, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania and Washington, got Department of Energy grants to purchase their solar-powered compactors.

Philadelphia used its grant to replace 700 litter baskets with 500 of the trash compactors and 210 sidewalk recycling cans in April 2009, [Streets Commissioner Clarena] Tolson says.

Not only have the containers helped with the green initiative, but they also reduced trash pickups from 17 times per week to five, she says.

As a result, employees have been reassigned where they are needed most.

"Philadelphia will save \$13 million in cumulative collection over the next 10 years," Tolson says. ...

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