

Order Requiring the Department of Streets and Sanitation to Implement a City-Wide Residential Source-Separated Recycling Program

WHEREAS, the City of Chicago, under the leadership of Mayor Richard M. Daley, has implemented a number of path breaking environmental initiatives and programs, such as the Brownfields Initiative, energy efficiency programs, the Center for Green Technology, and the Green Building, Green Bungalow and Green Roofs initiatives; and

WHEREAS, the City of Chicago's residential recycling programs stand as a blot on the City's otherwise admirable environmental record; and

WHEREAS, recycling conserves natural resources such as trees, oil, and mined metals; and products made with recycled materials consume less energy to manufacture than those made of raw materials, resulting in fewer fossil fuels being burned and less greenhouse gas created; and

WHEREAS, recycling creates jobs for the community, as industries are established and expanded to accept, process, and remanufacture clean and separately collected recycled materials; and

WHEREAS, the Illinois Solid Waste Planning and Recycling Act requires all Illinois counties and the City of Chicago to implement recycling programs that divert at least 25 percent of municipal waste to recycling; and

WHEREAS, recycling reduces the need for new landfills, which will be soon be in demand in the Chicago Metropolitan Region, as per the latest (2003) report by the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency, the region has only five years of remaining landfill capacity; and

WHEREAS, the City of Chicago Department of Streets and Sanitation currently operates a residential recycling program, termed the "blue bag program," which collects and mixes together recyclable materials, yard trimmings, and garbage; and

WHEREAS, the blue bag program has never successfully recovered more than 10 to 12 percent of the waste as usable, resalable commodities, that is, paper, cardboard, metals, glass, and plastic; and.

WHEREAS, the city, instead of separately collecting and hauling yard trimmings, mixes clean yard waste with the garbage, creating a contaminated substance it calls "screened yard waste," which cannot be composted on farmland or used in gardens; and

WHEREAS, the city currently allows 30 percent of the residential waste loads to bypass the city's own sorting facilities and instead be hauled directly to waste transfer stations, where little or none of the recyclable materials are recovered; and.

WHEREAS, the overall recovery rate for the blue bag program – by mixing garbage with recyclables, contaminating yard trimmings, and utilizing transfer stations – is currently only 8 percent, which is the lowest recovery rate since the program began in 1995; and

WHEREAS, the people of Chicago, understanding that the blue bag program does not effectively recover their recycled materials, have been unwilling to embrace the program, resulting in a participation rate of only 13 percent; and

WHEREAS, most major U.S. cities, including Los Angeles, Milwaukee, Minneapolis, New York City, Portland, San Francisco, and Seattle, have implemented citywide source-separated recycling and composting programs for their residents, which result in 20 to 50 percent recovery rates and 70 to 90 percent participation rates; and

WHEREAS, after ten years, the recovery and participation rates for the blue bag program are not only unacceptably low, but continue to decline; now, therefore,

BE IT HEREBY ORDERED that the City of Chicago Department of Streets and Sanitation implement a citywide source-separated residential recycling program that collects the full range of common household recyclable materials and yard waste separately from residential garbage collection; and

BE IT FURTHER ORDERED that the Department of Streets and Sanitation and other relevant City Departments implement regulations requiring private waste haulers to implement similar source-separated recycling programs; and

BE IT FURTHER ORDERED that these programs shall be fully implemented no later than January 1, 2009.

JOSEPH A. MOORE
Alderman, 49th Ward