



Refuse Department Activity Summary for 2021

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INTRODUCTION

The Refuse Department was faced with many challenges during 2021, but none more challenging than the continuation of the COVID-19 pandemic. This issue was particularly challenging for the Refuse Department because of the close proximity of working with other staff, interaction with the public, and the inability to work remotely. Overall, the Refuse Department did an excellent job during the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2021.

The COVID-19 pandemic provided additional uncertainty regarding tax revenues, but overall the Department remained fiscally viable finishing the year with a positive budget balance and an improvement in the cash balance of \$236,797, as compared to 2020.

The number of staff in the Refuse Department has declined over the past several years, due to budget cuts as a result of the tax collection woes of La Porte County and the limit on tax increases (1% tax cap on residential property valuation). In 2011, there were 26 staff in the Refuse Department, including the Superintendent position. Staffing levels have been reduced, and there has not been a Refuse Superintendent since 2015. In 2020, staff levels reached as low as eighteen (18) working staff members, however, by the fall of 2020 staffing had increased to twenty-one (21), and in 2021 staffing levels were increased to twenty-three (23). Because it has been difficult to find new employees that hold Commercial Driver's Licenses (CDL) nearly all of the new staff have been hired at a lower pay rate as Driver-Loaders in Training, and they are given one (1) year to obtain their CDL. After obtaining their CDL there pay is increased to the Driver-Loader pay level.

In the end, The Refuse Department managed these challenges and performed admirably throughout 2021.

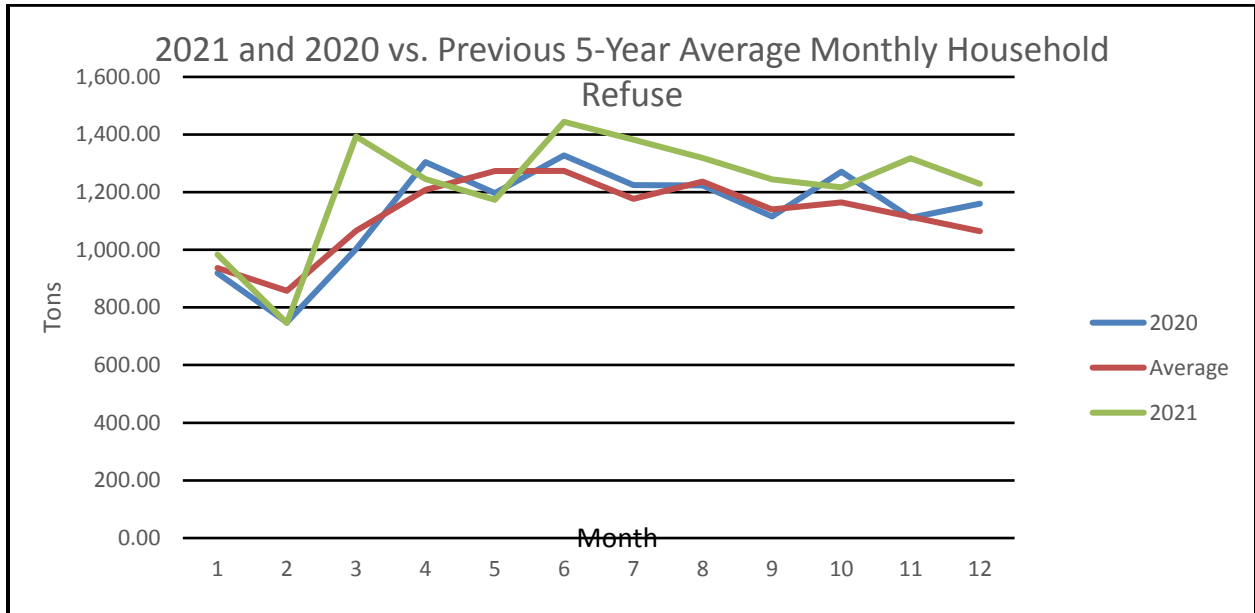
REFUSE TRASH AND HOUSEHOLD

The Refuse Department picked up and disposed of a total of 14,695 tons of Trash and Household waste in 2021. This represented an 8% increase over the amount picked up in 2020 (13,604 tons) and 9% more than the average of the past six (6) years (13,514 tons). These totals are presented in Table 1 and Graph 1, below.

Table 1
Trash/Household Refuse 2016 - 2021

Total Household							
	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Average
January	888.28	1,031.50	929.61	919.47	918.67	983.67	937.51
February	876.31	913.27	830.04	920.66	748.50	745.85	857.76
March	1,190.79	893.81	1,172.72	1,069.57	1,002.56	1,393.45	1,065.89
April	1,204.32	1,177.49	1,032.69	1,322.72	1,304.83	1,246.01	1,208.41
May	1,164.31	1,308.76	1,269.52	1,428.25	1,196.24	1,173.17	1,273.42
June	1,168.10	1,335.01	1,337.36	1,201.22	1,327.58	1,444.22	1,273.85
July	1,145.98	1,084.76	1,280.07	1,149.71	1,224.37	1,381.75	1,176.98
August	1,235.37	1,231.08	1,334.07	1,161.76	1,223.43	1,319.09	1,237.14
September	1,161.01	1,185.24	1,132.38	1,105.16	1,116.08	1,244.91	1,139.97
October	1,042.92	1,069.72	1,209.48	1,229.60	1,270.66	1,216.23	1,164.48
November	1,109.85	1,166.64	1,127.15	1,058.49	1,110.85	1,317.92	1,114.60
December	852.18	1,216.84	996.55	1,098.50	1,160.53	1,228.44	1,064.92
Yearly Totals	13,039.42	13,614.12	13,651.64	13,665.11	13,604.30	14,694.71	13,514.92

Graph 1



HOUSEHOLD PILES

One of the important tasks that the Refuse Department accomplishes is the pickup of Household Piles. These are sometimes called “loader jobs” or “ticket truck jobs” and such piles consist of furniture, appliances, mattresses, fixtures, and other household items. Additionally, the Refuse Department accomplishes “construction debris/special pickups” that require payment for such pickups as per City Code. In August 2019, the Refuse Department implemented a tracking system to track such pickups, and since its inception the Refuse Department has picked up 6,937 special pickups, through January 22, 2022. Please note these totals do not include any such piles picked up during Spring Clean-Up. Spring Clean-Up piles are not entered into the Tracking System.

There are two main ways that Household piles make the tracking system: 1) Residents call the Refuse Department to request a pickup or to notify the Refuse Department of a pile; or 2) Piles are noticed/observed by Refuse Department, Sanitary District, or other City staff. The date of the notification/observation is recorded in the tracking system, along with the pickup date. Using this data, the Refuse Department tracks the address of all pickups, total number of pickups, and the average number of days it took to pick up the pile. The 2020 and 2021 Household Pile Pickups Table, below, presents the pickup totals for each month and the average time it took the Refuse Department to pick up the pile since it was ready for pickup. In 2021 the number of piles picked up dropped to 2,230 piles, but the average pickup time improved to 5.8 days.

	2020 Total Pickups	2020 Average Days to Pickup	2021 Total Pickups	2021 Average Days to Pickup
Jan	243	1.4	112	1.5
Feb	177	1.8	74	4.0
Mar*	208	1.9	127	1.6
Apr*	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
May	165	7.9	204	3.0
Jun	575	11.1	200	3.2
Jul	176	6.9	356	6.7
Aug	411	17.9	230	9.5
Sep	334	15.1	327	9.1
Oct	311	4.7	203	9.2
Nov	177	4.0	256	5.5
Dec	179	9.4	140	1.9
Year	2,956	8.9	2,230	5.8

*March data includes only March 1st thru 19th. No data during Spring Clean-Up from March 20 thru May 1.

The increase in the amount of household tonnage in 2021 (see Table 1) may suggest that more of the smaller household piles were being addressed by the normal routes. This likely reduced the need for the calls for “special Pickups” and also helped to reduce the average time for pickup in 2021. It is also worth noting that over the last two years the months of August and September have had the longest average pickup times and the months of June through September have had the most pickups. This information can be used for future planning. Increased focus for ensuring that the special pickups are a priority during these months, upfront planning with implementation of specific concepts, and potential assistance from other departments and/or seasonal staff should help to improve the pickup response times during these seasonally high-volume months.

NEW EQUIPMENT

In 2020, the Sanitary District leased-ordered purchased three (3) new Dump Trucks that will be used to assist the Refuse Department. The Sanitary District took possession of these trucks in the last week of December 2020. These trucks became fully operational in 2021 and enhanced the production and efficiency of the Refuse Department. The funding for these trucks was made possible, in part, by a \$140,000 grant from the IDEM. These trucks are fueled by compressed natural gas (CNG). They operate very efficiently and greatly reduce air pollution as compared to a typical diesel-powered truck.

Additionally, in 2021, the Refuse Department purchased a used CNG fueled Garbage Truck that was previously used by the City of South Bend. This truck has proven to be a valuable addition to the Refuse fleet.

Furthermore, in 2021, the Refuse Department issued bids for new garage trucks with automatic side loading arms. Bids were received on November 17, 2021. The low bid was \$345,100 per truck.