



New curbside recycling creating competition for Austin nonprofits

by **Bettie Cross**

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Goodwill Industries of Central Texas concerned about competition from new for profit recycling company

December 5th is the first day of Austin's new curbside recycling service and the kickoff is already creating controversy. Simple Recycling has a deal with the City of Austin to pick up bags filled with unwanted clothes, shoes, toys, small appliances and small furniture. Simple Recycling makes money when it tries to resell the donations to keep them out of the landfill. But Simple Recycling is a for profit company that is collecting the same items Goodwill depends on to provide education and training for people who have trouble finding jobs.

There are about 60 Goodwill Industries collection sites in Central Texas and many people live three to five miles from one of them. Despite that, it's estimated 85 percent of clothing does not get donated or recycled. It gets trashed. Which is why Goodwill Industries, the Salvation Army and other nonprofits are now having to compete for the items people don't want, but they desperately need.

"I'm getting some rain boots for my sister-in-law," said Lucinda Garcia.

Garcia says she grew up wearing hand-me-downs and knows what a difference the donations can make.

"A lot of people can't afford to go to a department store and so clothes that I don't use or my kids don't use I donate to Goodwill," said Garcia. "I feel that I'm doing some good."

But now Goodwill is worried donations and sales will start to drop.

"Yes, this is a real concern for us," said Ana Rummer, the Communications Manager at Goodwill Industries of Central Texas.

Rummer says, starting Monday, Goodwill and Austin's other nonprofits are competing with Simple Recycling.

"It's really uncharted territory for us," said Rummer.

Jessica Worden brought several bags on donations to Goodwill on Monday. She's aware she now has a choice of either driving a few miles to donate her stuff or letting Simple Recycling pick it up at her house.

Having a curb-side option is likely to change how much stuff she continues to take to Goodwill.

"I love the fact it's convenient," said Worden. "Sometimes it's hard for me to get here and sometime with my back it's hard to move things in."

So far this year Goodwill Industries of Central Texas has gotten over a million donations. Goodwill expects to get another one hundred thousand in December. But if donations and sales slowdown so could their ability to educate and train people who face barriers to finding work. For now, Rummer says Goodwill is going to remain optimistic since items donated curbside will not have a tax write off.

"Helping their neighbor find a job will encourage them to drive the extra couple of miles to drop off their donation," said Rummer.

CBS Austin asked Simple Recycling for an on-camera interview for this story. The company representative is out of town and was only available by phone.

Sonny Wilkins says, "We don't see it as competition."

Instead, Wilkins says Simple Recycling is targeting people who would normally trash their unwanted items and not recycle them.

Goodwill says it plans to keep track of donations over the next few months and see if the curb-side service has an impact.