Recycling goes Athens-wide

All those living across the municipality of Athens will soon be able to recycle

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A hundred automated recycling points will be installed throughout the city of Athens by the end of the year along with 2,000 recycling bins

RESIDENTS throughout the city of Athens - the country's single biggest municipality - will have access to recycling facilities by the end of the year, according to Chris Tedomas, deputy mayor for the environment. After evaluating the results of a pilot project that took place last summer, the city has come up with a plan to extend recycling to all neighbourhoods.

"I believe that by the end of the year all Athenians will have access to recycling points. Hopefully, within the next four months the recycling project will be extended to cover more than half the city of Athens and almost two-thirds by the summer," Tedomas told the Athens News.
The city of Athens produces over 1,300 tonnes of household and commercial waste a day, including 533 tonnes of packaging waste and 211 tonnes of paper. The city aims to recycle nearly 60 percent of its packaging waste and 30 percent of its paper waste by 2011.

To decide the best way to achieve this target, the municipality conducted a pilot recycling project between June and September 2005 using three different companies to collect recyclable waste in different ways.

On February 3, Alexandra Toya of Athens' municipal development company presented the pilot project results during a waste management conference. "The first results of the project's implementation are quite satisfactory, specially if we take into account that because this was a pilot project it was not supported by a large-scale information campaign... and that it took place mainly during the summer period," Toya said.

According to Toya and her colleagues, each of the recycling bins situated around Victoria Square and Alexandras Avenue which had three slots, for paper, plastic and metals, collected on average around 40 kilos of waste per week. The report on the pilot projects' results points out that unwanted materials dumped in the bins progressively decreased and, as a result, by the end of the project, the materials registered purity levels of around 87 percent compared to just 65 percent at the beginning of the project.

The automated collection points located in Korai and Syntagma Square gathered pure materials only, as they are programmed to reject unsuitable waste. And the waste bins around the Acropolis area, into which residents simply dumped their mixed recyclable waste, registered the least satisfactory purity levels, 55-70 percent.

In the end, two of the three programmes received final approval and will roll out according to neighbourhood needs. "By the end of the year over 2,000 three-stream recycling bins will be installed throughout the city along with 100 automated collection points," Tendomas said.

Meanwhile, in a related survey it was revealed that nearly all Athenian households and businesses think recycling is imperative, but a significant number didn't know whether some of the products they use daily can be recycled. For example, more than one in four
households and one in five businesses either didn't think glass can be recycled or didn't know whether it can. The same holds for more than 65 percent of households regarding iron and batteries.

The city is now in talks with the Hellenic Recyling Company, a non-profit organisation that has been set up to fund and facilitate recycling in Greece using business funding. All importers and manufacturers of consumer goods contribute to the organisation's funds, according to the quantities of recyclable materials they have produced and disposed of in the Greek market. The city is also considering developing a separate system to collect recyclables from big businesses.