



# Time to Take out the Trash

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On the heels of a report finding that St. Louis has some of the [poorest-quality city services](#) in America, residents have criticized the city for [falling behind in trash collection](#), and the problem continues to pile up. This situation quite literally stinks. How did we get here?

Originally, the city paid for solid waste collection from ordinary tax revenues. However due to budget constraints—maybe due to the city [giving away hundreds of millions of dollars in tax subsidies](#)—the Board of Aldermen [passed a bill](#) in 2010 to implement an \$11 monthly fee per household to help cover refuse costs. Last August, the [Board voted](#) to increase the fee to \$14. The additional money was for, among other things, obtaining new garbage trucks to “ensure garbage collectors won't be forced to work overtime because they're stuck with poorly functioning trucks.”

And what have the [results](#) been? The city's fleet of garbage trucks continues to deteriorate. Roughly half of the 84 trucks are in disrepair, leaving the other half to cover the 55 daily routes. Even with [extended hours](#) and 12 new—leased—trucks, the city still lacks the resources to pick up the trash on time, so the dumpsters continue to overflow.

We are not suggesting that the problem here is exclusively the fault of city officials. For one

thing, piles of uncollected garbage don't make for good optics if you're an elected official with constituents to keep happy. And the decision to lease new trucks rather than buy them looks like a reasonable response from a city that is behind on maintenance for the trucks it already owns.

Maybe the larger issue is that garbage collection is a better fit for private companies than for a city government. Privatizing this service would allow residents to choose their garbage collector, unlike now, creating competition among service providers and incentivizing high-quality, efficient operations. Wichita, Kansas, a city with 80,000 more people than St. Louis, has no city-run solid waste collection system. The average household in Wichita spends [\\$25 per month](#) on garbage collection. (In comparing this rate to costs in Saint Louis, keep in mind that St. Louis's current \$14 per month fee is *in addition to* the money from the overall city budget that goes toward trash collection.) As for the quality of service provided, we can't claim to have our fingers on the pulse of the Wichita trash-collection scene, but our internet searches yielded nothing like [this](#) or [this](#) or [this](#) in Wichita.

Maybe it is time to see if the private sector has an answer to this embarrassing—and smelly—problem.

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[3] <http://showmeinstitute.org/blog/local-government/how-well-are-missouri-cities-run>

- [4] <https://fox2now.com/2018/07/18/st-louis-trash-truck-shortage-as-garbage-piling-up/>  
[5] <http://showmeinstitute.org/blog/subsidies/subsidies-saint-louis-part-1-0>  
[6] [https://www.stltoday.com/news/local/govt-and-politics/st-louis-to-start-charging-for-trash-pickup/article\\_0e349b5b-28a1-5de0-8ec7-6e33068693f0.html](https://www.stltoday.com/news/local/govt-and-politics/st-louis-to-start-charging-for-trash-pickup/article_0e349b5b-28a1-5de0-8ec7-6e33068693f0.html)  
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[8] [https://www.stltoday.com/news/local/metro/with-nearly-half-its-garbage-trucks-breaking-down-st-louis/article\\_d17b4f44-a562-5164-9020-0fd3da3aa874.html](https://www.stltoday.com/news/local/metro/with-nearly-half-its-garbage-trucks-breaking-down-st-louis/article_d17b4f44-a562-5164-9020-0fd3da3aa874.html)  
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[11] <https://www.ksdk.com/article/news/local/trash-overload-leaves-people-furious-in-south-st-louis/63-573694926>  
[12] <https://www.riverfronttimes.com/newsblog/2018/07/18/st-louis-trash-service-is-a-damn-dumpster-fire>  
[13] <https://kmox.radio.com/articles/aldermen-receive-numerous-calls-reporting-spotty-trash-pick>

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