

Letter to the Editor: Support Recycling in New Jersey

From Jane Kozinski Assistant Commissioner for Environmental Management, NJDEP

Posted in the New Brunswick Patch by Jennifer Bradshaw, Editor, November 23, 2013

More than 25 years ago, New Jersey paved the way by adopting the nation's first statewide mandatory recycling law. Today, New Jersey residents recycle an average of 40 percent of their municipal solid waste, one of the best rates in the nation and significantly better than the 34.7 percent national average.

The Christie Administration is proud to support New Jersey's recycling programs across our towns and counties. As we celebrate America Recycles Day this month, it is a time to celebrate New Jersey's recycling successes. It's also a time renew our commitment to recycling and look ahead to creating new and innovative recycling opportunities.



*After dipping for many years, the state's recycling rate has been rising again, thanks to work being done here at the Department of Environmental Protection and with our partners. We have been working hard with municipal and county governments to educate the public about the continued need to recycle. **The Association of New Jersey Recyclers has been a longstanding and vital partner.***

But we can do even better. While many communities are nearing or have hit our 50 percent recycling goal, many others have not. I commend those communities that have reached this goal and urge them to continue working to boost rates even more.

And I am asking those cities and towns that have not reached this target to work even harder, to reinvigorate their programs and work toward that 50 percent goal.

In addition to the obvious benefits of helping our environment and conserving resources, recycling saves local governments money and generates revenues. It also creates thousands of jobs.

The average disposal cost for a ton of municipal solid waste in New Jersey is about \$75. The average value of a ton of recyclables placed at the curb is worth at least \$50 per ton.

For towns and cities that provide curbside collection to their residents, this means they lose about \$125 for every ton of recyclables that is disposed at landfills or incinerators instead of being recycled.

If that weren't enough, consider this:

- *Recycling significantly extends the lives of landfills, minimizing the need to build new disposal facilities in the future.*
- *By recycling 1.5 million tons of paper in New Jersey, we are reducing air emissions equivalent to taking 580,000 motor vehicles off the road compared with making paper products from virgin materials.*
- *According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, on average, 1.67 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalents are avoided for every ton of municipal solid waste recycled.*

So how can we improve?

Many of our businesses are still not recycling, or are not recycling as much as they could. We'd like to encourage our business community to take responsibility for their recyclables.

There are simple, cost-effective ways for our small businesses, shopping malls, convenience stores, hotels, retail shops, and office buildings to comply with the law. We invite them to partner with the DEP in developing strategies to improve their recycling performance.

In addition, I urge our businesses that are recycling superstars to mentor others in the business community on how to incorporate waste minimization and recycling into their business plans. Use existing business associations to help you coordinate this mentoring effort.

At the local government level, I strongly urge recycling coordinators, public works officials, town councils and mayors, and environmental commissions to take a hard look at your public spaces. Are there recycling containers on your main streets? In your parks?

Making it easy for people to recycle by placing receptacles in public parks, shopping areas, office complexes and other common areas is probably the most critical step you can take to make recycling successful. Every outdoor event such as festivals, county fairs and street markets should provide containers for both trash and recyclables. It seems simple enough, but you'd be surprised how often this is overlooked.

At the DEP, we are making food waste recycling a priority. Many of our restaurants, grocery stores, universities and colleges already are collecting food waste for composting, conversion to energy through anaerobic digestion, or to feed livestock.

Unfortunately, they have to send food waste out of state because New Jersey does not currently have commercial-scale food waste recycling capacity. Until we do, source separation of food wastes will not be widely available to our residents, businesses and institutions.

The DEP welcomes proposals for the development of responsible food waste recycling capacity in our state so we can accelerate the diversion of those materials from the waste stream.

Recycling is working in New Jersey. Many of our local governments, businesses and institutions are shining examples of the strong recycling work ethic that spreads throughout their communities.

Let's not just celebrate America Recycles Day as a one-day event. Let's make it the starting point for everyone – every local and county government, every business, every school and every institution, to renew their commitment to recycling.

Look at what's working, and look at what you can do to improve. Get your family, friends, co-workers, teachers and schoolmates, neighbors and employers involved.

Recycling is good for New Jersey's environment, good for your pocketbook and good for our economy.

For information on recycling, including tips, statistics, trends, a downloadable audio public service announcement, and more, visit: www.RecycleNJ.org.

-Jane Kozinski