



EarthWatch Rhode Island



Topic: Commercial Recycling Success: Whole Foods Markets
Date: February 6, 2009
Location: Whole Foods Market, 261 Waterman Street, Providence

In an effort to increase recycling in the business sector, the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (DEM) offers a commercial recycling program to help businesses comply with the State's mandatory recycling law and to help preserve landfill capacity. Rhode Island businesses generate approximately 60 percent of the waste buried in the state's Central Landfill, or about 700,000 tons a year.

Under the commercial recycling law all businesses are required to recycle, and those with 50 or more employees that generate solid waste are required to submit an annual recycling report and information about their waste streams to DEM by March 1. Seventeen materials including cardboard, office paper, newspaper, cans and glass must be recycled. The regulations also prohibit solid waste facilities from accepting loads of commercial waste containing more than 20 percent of recyclables.

Last month, DEM sent letters to more than 2,000 businesses throughout the state requesting that they report information about their recycling efforts during the 2008 calendar year via the on-line reporting system at www.ri.gov. This is the second year in which DEM has required businesses to report information about their recycling efforts to the Department via the online system.

DEM will begin enforcing the state's mandatory commercial recycling regulations after the deadline for submitting the report has passed. This enforcement initiative will include unscheduled inspections of recycling programs at randomly selected companies.

The commercial recycling regulations can be found on DEM's website, www.dem.ri.gov, by clicking on "Regulations," then "Waste Management." For additional questions or information, contact Alyson Silva, recycling coordinator, at 222-4700 ext. 7134.

Last year, 489 annual recycling reports for the 2007 calendar year were submitted to DEM, covering 817 business locations throughout the state. The overwhelming majority of Rhode Island businesses and agencies said recycle a portion of their waste products; the overall average commercial recycling rate in 2007 was 29.44 percent.

See the chart below for sector-by-sector recycling rates:

Sector	Percent that Recycle	Average Recycling Rate
Educational	85 %	13%
Financial	92%	23%
Government	76%	27%
Healthcare	84%	16%
Housing	100%	27%
Manufacturing	85%	37%
Office	73%	27%
Public Utility	100%	32%
Restaurant	95%	13%
Retail	93%	35%
Warehouse	88%	31%
Other	88%	19%

Commercial Recycling Success Story: WholeFoods Market

WholeFoods Market is an excellent example of a company that is dedicated to recycling and reducing the amount of waste it generates. At its three Rhode Island locations, and other stores nationwide, the company has been an excellent environmental steward and carries out the following practices:

Recycling

- Provides a dedicated area at the front of the store where the public can recycle plastic bags and a variety of mixed materials including bottles, cans and paper.
- Spoiled produce and other biodegradable waste that used to go into landfills is now being backhauled by Whole Foods' delivery trucks to regional facilities where it is turned into compost. Then, it is sold in some Whole Foods Markets.
- Holds company and community recycling drives
- Uses recycled paper with a high percentage of post-consumer waste whenever possible
- Provides receptacles for glass and plastic recycling in the store's dining areas along with collection boxes in many stores for cell phones

Reducing Waste

- Uses biodegradable supplies for food (salad bar) and wine sampling.
- Composting
- Does not use plastic grocery bags but will recycle them for the public
- Offers a computerized, paperless ordering system to reduce paper waste

Reusing Materials

- The store strongly encourages using reusable grocery bags by providing affordable bags and by paying at least a nickel-per-bag refund

- Provides reusable and biodegradable plates and bowls in dining areas
- Saves packing peanuts and donates them to local shipping stores, and works with suppliers to eliminate Styrofoam use in shipping
- Biodegradable food packaging — The store is in the process of replacing traditional plastic and paper prepared food containers and utensils with all-natural fiber packaging that is environmentally friendly. Made from renewable resources such as sugar cane pulp, corn starch and bamboo, they are completely compostable and, because they are unbleached, free from chlorine and dioxins.

Visuals:

- Company recycling program – recycling area/bins at front of store, storage containers, trash compactors, Biodegradable containers, green bags, salad bar

Interviews:

- Alyson Silva, DEM's recycling coordinator, spoke about why it is important that businesses complete the online reports by March 1 and how DEM uses the information in the reports. She also provided an overview of the commercial recycling program and audits offered by DEM, and spoke about how Whole Foods is an example of a business that goes above and beyond the requirements for recycling.
- A representative from Whole Foods Market provided details on the store's recycling program and related environmental initiatives.