

# Rhode Island Comprehensive Solid Waste Management Planning Committee Municipal Recycling Sub-Committee

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## Forward

Municipal Recycling in Rhode Island has evolved as a way of life for a majority of residents. Since the inception in 1987, both DEM and RIRRC have developed programs to expand and improve services and regulations. From the original “Blue Box” to “Maximum Recycling”, residents have overall embraced the concept and the “no cost” program. The collection and processing expenses of the program have been hidden in real estate taxes or absorbed by the overall disposal fees assessed each community by the RIRRC. While the disposal fees are relatively low compared to abutting states, RIRRC maintains and funds all municipal disposal and recyclables processing services within the confines of their budget and has exhibited a positive cash flow annually.

The *mandatory* recycling program has not been enforced but has received a subtle acceptance by the communities and their residents. All parties involved, DEM, RIRRC and the municipalities, have accepted the recycling rates for what they are and have exercised little in the way of enforcing the *mandatory* aspect of the program. While DEM and RIRRC have promoted, endorsed, and advocated for user fee-based trash collection programs, no community has adopted a municipal curbside collection program on that basis. With that said the recycling rates throughout the state are based on participation rates and capture rates significantly lower than anticipated for a *mandatory* program.

### Points of Emphasis

1. **Municipal Collection Programs** The basic premise for the collection of municipal solid waste has not changed in decades. The source sorting system has been altered from time to time but the concept of curbside collection of MSW and other sorted items has remained uninterrupted. The collection of source-separated recyclables was endorsed by DEM, RIRRC, and the State legislature in 1986 and has only been altered moderately since Recycling’s inception. Literally thousands of communities throughout the country

have adopted volume-based collection of MSW to promote recycling and prolong landfill capacity. ***It is the recommendation of the subcommittee that RIRRC and DEM further encourage municipalities to adopt volume-based curbside collection programs in order to increase the collection of recyclable materials and thus prolong the life expectancy of the landfill. Through this effort DEM should provide planning assistance and RIRRC should provide financial incentives for the implementation of such programs.***

2. **Municipal Waste Stream Analysis** The residential solid waste stream is evolving in many aspects. Residents have increased their purchase behavior toward single serve and disposable items. Materials in the waste stream have changed with the changes in socio-demographics of the area. Households with both or single parents working full time has increased the purchase of prepared food and the packaging that comes with it. Inexpensive electronic components have spawned a generation of new purchases in lieu of repairs to existing items. While recycling has become a way of life for many residents the capture rate of many items nationally has decreased. ***It is the recommendation of the subcommittee that RIRRC commission an independent study of the municipal waste stream in Rhode Island. The study should focus on but not be limited to waste analysis, participation rate and capture rate of recyclable materials, container capacity, and recommendations to increase participation and capture rates.*** The state of Pennsylvania has recently completed a comprehensive waste composition analysis which included a component dealing with the capture of recyclable materials. (See [http://www.dep.state.pa.us/dep/deputate/airwaste/wm/recycle/Waste\\_Comp/Study.htm](http://www.dep.state.pa.us/dep/deputate/airwaste/wm/recycle/Waste_Comp/Study.htm) for more information).
  
3. **Re-Use Centers** Some of the material collected at curbside has been replaced by updated items yet still has a useful life left. Material such as electronic components, construction (or demolition) materials, appliances, and manufacturers overruns, discontinued models, and scrap can be used or reused in other venues. Much like the Recycling for R I Education program that promotes educational uses for scrap materials from manufacturers, programs such as the Reuse Development Organization in Indianapolis and the Loading Dock in Philadelphia and Boston connect low to moderate income individuals with resources needed to improve their home or neighborhood at low to lower prices. Other local programs such as the Paint Shed and recycle barn at the Rehoboth transfer station, and the R I Donation Exchange Program in Providence provide reuse options to simple disposal of useful goods. A Regional Material Exchange program could provide updated resources for commercial and industrial goods available online to vendors and or buyers. Minimal pricing and free supplies are available through this service. Many options are available as alternatives for disposal in the rapidly filling landfill. ***It is the recommendation of the subcommittee that RIRRC develop and promote alternative reuse centers designed to eliminate unnecessary disposal of materials with a useful life. Matching grants may be promoted as an incentive for nonprofit organizations or municipalities to initiate reuse activities and programs. Special consideration in the form of waiving or reducing the disposal fees may be granted to non-profit organizations associated with re-use programs directed toward the public.***

#### ***Mandatory Recyclable - Landfill Banned Materials -***

The question arises; Is an item that is classified as a “mandated recyclable material” also banned from the landfill?

If the answer is yes to the above question, it is incumbent on the RIRRC to keep banned materials from the landfill. If the answer is no, it is incumbent on DEM to enforce mandatory recycling laws. Either way ***it is the recommendation of the subcommittee that a position be created at the office of the Department of Environmental Management to oversee enforcement of Rhode Island municipal recycling regulations established in RIGL 23-18 and 23-19 and furthered specified by the RIRRC policies and the DEM Municipal Recycling Regulations. Enforcement of these regulations shall include but shall not be limited to the oversight of the mandatory recyclable material list as amended.***

It is recognized that companies associated with the collection of recyclable material and solid waste have on occasion expedited their route collection by not segregating the collection process. While there exists a requirement by law not to exceed 10% mixed recyclables in a solid waste load dumped at the RIRRC, to the sub-committee's knowledge there has not been a fine issued for such actions. With the establishment of the newly constructed tipping building at RIRRC, the ability to inspect and video tape loads being tipped on the floor would enable the RIRRC to issue fines for repeated offenders of the mandatory recycling law. ***It is the recommendation of the subcommittee that RIRRC enforce the mandatory recycling regulations by citing and fining where applicable haulers with existing disposal. Contractors that do not meet current standards for segregated solid waste loads may be denied access to the RIRRC disposal site.***

### ***Mandatory recyclable materials list -***

RIGL 23-18.8-2(11) directs DEM to redefine the mandated materials and to change them "... from time to time depending upon new technologies, economic conditions, waste stream characteristics, environmental effects or other factors." With that charge, the subcommittee recommends to DEM the following changes in the mandated materials list:

1. ***Textiles*** While textiles' recycling is a viable option to disposal of such materials, the quantity and quality of material received at curbside during municipal collection is not up to marketable standards. The MRF sorting process does not permit the relatively limited quantity of textiles recovered through the curbside program to be processed in an acceptable manner. There are an abundance of alternative independent collection options available to residents in Rhode Island to advocate recycling options for such materials. ***It is therefore recommended that textiles be removed from the list of mandated recyclable materials and dealt with as a material, which DEM advocates for alternative recycling methods.***
2. ***Leaf & Yard Debris*** As much as 17% of all municipal waste is comprised of compostable leaf & yard (L&Y) waste. While the current disposal fee for segregated (L&Y) waste at RIRRC is less than regular MSW, it is not significant enough to warrant segregated collection in many communities. RIRRC and municipal compost operations prolong the life expectancy of the landfill and should be promoted and encouraged statewide.  
***It is the recommendation of the subcommittee that all leaf & yard debris two inches in diameter or less be added as a mandatory recyclable and all RIRRC disposal fees associated with such material be waived for municipalities under contract. In order to encourage segregated collection of leaf & yard debris, RIRRC should offer financial assistance to municipalities to establish and sustain collection programs and/or compost operations. It is furthered recommended that DEM revisit the Compost Regulations with regard to municipal leaf & yard debris only sites and amend the regulations to be more "municipally friendly" regarding testing requirements.***
3. ***Electronic Components*** Computers and related electronic components are becoming an increasing percentage of the residential waste stream. Units containing cathode ray tubes (CRT) including television screens and computer monitors as well as other computer equipment contain heavy metals and present a detrimental impact if disposed of in landfills. Both Massachusetts and Maine have banned the disposal of CRTs in landfills, and CRTs are currently classified by RI DEM as Universal Waste (See DEM Universal Waste Fact Sheet): <http://www.state.ri.us/dem/programs/benviron/assist/pdf/univrule.pdf> .  
***It is the recommendation of the subcommittee that CRTs in particular be placed on the mandatory recyclable list. It is also recommended that a means of drop-off and collection be established regionally by RIRRC for all electronic components including but not limited to computer modules, audio & video players, amplifiers, receivers, and other such items identified as recyclable at no cost to residents or municipalities.***

4. **Tires** Used auto and truck tires have become a hard to dispose item in recent years. While the large-scale scrap tire piles have been eliminated residents and municipalities are still faced with few proper disposal options. There is a demonstrated demand for tires as a fuel source in the area and therefore have a reuse, albeit a waste to energy source.  
***It is the recommendation of the subcommittee that the RIRRC encourage and promote the recycling of tires at the facility. While there is a fee associated with the processing of the tires the subcommittee does not feel it is excessive or burdensome.***
  
5. **Glass** Container glass has been on the mandatory recyclable list since the inception in 1987. The demands and markets of glass fluctuated greatly. The demise of glass container manufacturers in the area has severely hampered the recycling efforts. ***It is the recommendation of the subcommittee that RIRRC and DEM seek and advocate for alternative reuses for glass cullet including but not limited to use as aggregate for cover, conduits, and other construction operations pursuant to RI DOT contract specifications.***

### **SUMMARY**

It is the conclusion of the subcommittee that the recycling program in the State of Rhode Island appears to have reached its maximum potential with the existing incentive structure. The municipal collection program currently provides little incentive for municipalities to increase participation or recovery rates. The extraordinarily low tipping fee set by the General Assembly for municipal solid waste does not provide sufficient incentive to reduce disposal tonnages. Not until the present landfill approaches capacity and siting controversy arises, or the tipping fees for municipal solid waste increase dramatically, will there be an incentive to *mandate* recycling programs as they should be enforced. To that end, the “Maximum Recycling Program” should be supplemented by volume based solid waste collection programs to truly maximize the current recycling and composting programs. Monetary incentives should be used to entice volume-based collection programs much like the recycling grants in the 80's and early 90's promoted recycling statewide. Unfortunately, history has shown that monetary incentives drive municipal participation in many programs. For many communities, such an incentive may be the primary motivation for implementing a new and somewhat politically challenging program. Economics override environmental concerns until they appear “in my back yard”. Enforcement of existing recycling ordinances may have an affect but with great reluctance in most communities.

The current system is the best available until there is a change in the municipal solid waste disposal fee structure in Rhode Island. It will be a status quo until changes can be made, possibly on a statewide level. Public education, school education and other promotion may make some headway in future, but minimal results can be expected based solely on those programs. What you see is what you've got without any substantive structural change.