

Let's Improve Our Recycling Rate

By: Erin Jensen, Recycling Specialist, New Jersey DEP, Division of Solid and Hazardous Waste

New Jersey recently celebrated the 30th anniversary of its mandatory Statewide Mandatory Source Separation and Recycling Act ("Recycling Act"), which was the first such law of its kind in the United States and established New Jersey as a national leader in recycling.

Since its establishment, the Recycling Act has required recycling in the residential, commercial and institutional sectors, and established a target goal of recycling 50 percent of New Jersey's municipal solid waste (MSW) -- bottles, cans, paper, plastic and cardboard boxes that are generated in homes, offices, businesses, schools and hospitals. Those efforts have helped New Jersey reach a statewide MSW recycling rate of 41 percent, which exceeds the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's national recycling/composting rate of 34.6 percent in 2014. The EPA has collected and reported data on the generation and disposition of the nation's waste for more than 30 years. Consequently, New Jersey's 50 percent MSW recycle goal is in reach, and we believe that now is the time to reinvigorate our efforts to reach – and surpass – that goal.

Most people know that recycling preserves expensive landfill space, saves energy, supports recycling businesses and saves money, yet further public education is needed to ensure that every citizen in the state understands what to do and how to do it. Success at that level will allow New Jersey to achieve and surpass the 50 percent goal established under the Recycling Act. To achieve that threshold, the state, counties and municipalities must work together to educate the public about recycling. Municipalities play an especially important role in this education since they deal directly with their communities.

Some facts about local government's role in recycling:

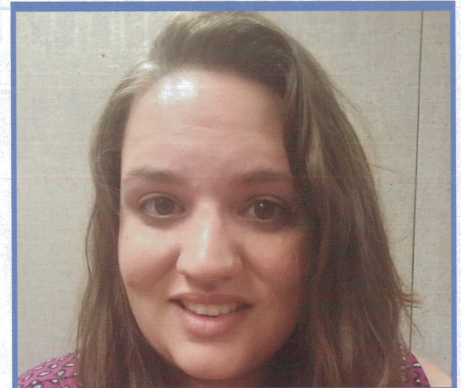
- Each of New Jersey's 565 municipalities must have a designated recycling

coordinator with a professional recycling certification;

- Municipalities must regularly notify their community about local recycling opportunities, and the source separation (separating recyclables from garbage) requirements of their specific municipal ordinance; and
- Every municipality must adopt an ordinance that establishes a local recycling program designed to meet the 50 percent MSW recycling goal by requiring home owners, businesses, schools, and other organizations to source separate recyclable materials. This includes setting standards for the placement and temporary storage of all recyclable materials in all new multi-family housing developments, and specifying the municipal official(s) designated to enforce the recycling ordinances.

In addition, municipal recycling officials must gather and report local recycling data, which is then used to calculate their town's recycling tonnage grant award from the state. This data collection is critical because it allows the state to assess its progress toward the MSW goal and helps determine obstacles to meeting that goal. Furthermore, the state tonnage grants can be significant, depending on the size of the municipality, with the state issuing more than \$14 million in recycling tonnage grants to municipalities (as well as several counties) in 2016.

New Jersey's 50 percent MSW recycling goal is attainable with the continued and improved cooperation of our municipalities. While many of our municipalities are doing an exemplary job, some continue to struggle to reach the goal and need help reinvigorating their recycling program to achieve greater success. We ask those New Jersey municipalities that are recycling "superstars" to find a neighboring town that needs help. Partner with them to show them how and why your town is successful. Mentor a town with a similar demographic.



Erin Jensen is an Environmental Services Trainee with the NJDEP, Division of Solid and Hazardous Waste Management working full time with the Recycling Unit. Her goal is to work with the county and municipal recycling coordinators to help New Jersey achieve the State's goal of 50% MSW recycling. She got her degree in Environmental Studies from Rowan University in 2012

Towns in need of assistance should reach out to their respective County Recycling Coordinators and together outline a few simple steps that can be done this year to improve recycling programs. Such efforts may include joining up with county-wide recycling programs; conducting a county-wide or municipal recycling enforcement blitz; or doing specific outreach on your town's recycling "big hitters" such as schools, hospitals and multi-family housing locations, and ensuring that they are achieving recycling successes. Finally, reach out to the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection for assistance and support. By working together, we can improve and increase our municipal recycling efforts, and meet our state recycling goal.

For more information about recycling in New Jersey, visit www.recycle.nj.gov or speak to your County Recycling Coordinator. ♻️