

FORWARD

Every one of us generates waste. With approximately 8.4 million residents living in the most densely populated state in the nation, the environmentally sound management of New Jersey's solid waste is a public policy challenge that is neither static nor insignificant in scope.

From the disposal capacity crisis of the mid-1980's, the dissolution of regulatory flow control of the mid-1990's and to falling recycling rates over the last several years, this issue is marked by the need for ongoing governmental attention. Upward trends in the generation of solid waste over the past several years may prompt some counties to consider the identification of additional disposal capacity in the not too distant future, in a regional marketplace that may make that increasingly more difficult. If recent generation trends continue and we do nothing to reduce the waste stream or increase recycling tonnage, one can predict a waste stream of some 33 million tons by 2015. The present transfer and disposal system in this state is not sufficient to provide for the management of this volume of waste on a uniform, statewide basis, and it is in this context that the following Statewide Solid Waste Management Plan (Plan) update is presented.

This document is intended to provide the framework and vision necessary for all levels of government in the state to understand the current challenge and fulfill their responsibilities under the Solid Waste Management Act. This Plan, which had been released in draft form earlier in 2005, incorporates comments from the New Jersey Advisory Council on Solid Waste Management (Council), county and local officials, representatives of the solid waste industry, and interested members of the public. Those comments, and the Department's responses, are included as an appendix to this document.

This Plan details the steps necessary to enhance recycling through state, county and local government action, and provides recommendations for legislative initiatives necessary to assist in this endeavor. When these various strategies are implemented, the diverse costs associated with solid waste management – from natural resource utilization to air and water pollution and commitment of local tax dollars – will be reduced. In fact, since some of the initiatives identified in the Plan are so basic, the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) has wasted no time and has already begun to explore putting them in place as soon as possible. Developing a concerted set of recycling compliance and enforcement measures as well as initiating a dialogue concerning restoration of dedicated funding for recycling programs are prime examples of these initiatives.

Cognizant of the need to identify barriers to increased recycling and engage the efforts of those local experts and other critical parties, even before the formal adoption of this Plan, the Department recently brought together a diverse group of experts under the heading of the "Reinvigorating Recycling Workgroup". At the inaugural meeting in June, 2005, the Workgroup was charged with producing recommendations to increase recycling rates in the state that could be accomplished in the short-term (typically under 18 months). Four committees were established at that meeting, including Education, Local Government,

Business and State Government/DEP. The four committees met over the fall, 2005, and presented the Department with their recommendations at a meeting held on December 1, 2005. Those recommendations, presented as an "Action Plan", include such items as: the development of a new, "branded" recycling message; an analysis of the current method for reporting recycling activity to the department; increasing the involvement of the waste hauling industry in providing recycling opportunities, especially for small and medium sized businesses; increasing the level of enforcement of recycling mandates, and rebuilding support for recycling at the local government level. The Workgroup, with the full and enthusiastic support of the department, will continue to work on these and other issues limiting the growth of recycling in the state. The department is indebted to the commitment of these individuals, and the organizations, both public and private, that graciously provide their time to this effort.

In a number of areas, the Plan breaks new ground. For example, the legislative initiatives suggested in the Plan bring new attention to commercial product responsibility and stewardship, including proposals on toxic packaging, mercury-containing products and electronics recycling. Also, for the first time the Plan presents contingency planning for the significant solid waste challenges that might result from a terror event or natural disaster. The Council and the public have played, and will continue to play, a critical role in shaping these initiatives.

The Plan is designed to be a living document that will prompt additional dialogue and development of additional initiatives to enhance solid waste management and recycling opportunities in the state. For example, we need to pay further attention to waste minimization and waste reduction proposals. Also, we must identify additional areas in which regulatory reform would contribute to more rational and cost effective solid waste management and planning. We need to ensure that such reform reconciles an outdated regulatory structure with a solid waste market that has changed dramatically since New Jersey's solid waste management laws were last amended. In particular, the state must consider whether it is time for a wholesale phase-out of remaining areas of tipping fee regulation, linked perhaps to dedication of revenues to recycling and capacity development.

The state must also do a much better job of integrating solid waste management with other environmental concerns. For example, we must adequately address the linkages between solid waste capacity planning and New Jersey's air pollution and traffic congestion. In particular, we must develop specific proposals to shift solid waste transport from trucks to rail and marine facilities. There should be recommendations for a comprehensive solution to the emerging problem of solid and hazardous waste transfer facilities that use the federal transportation laws to evade both state and county regulation to protect public health and the environment. While the department is revising its regulations to meet this challenge and has urged members of New Jersey's congressional delegation to clarify applicable federal law, the Council and the public may have additional ideas and proposals to meet this challenge.

Given this vision, and mindful of the consequences for failing to take action at this time, the state fully anticipates a focused and collaborative effort by all parties to reinvigorate the recycling mandate in New Jersey, and return us to a solid waste management policy that demonstrates true leadership. This Plan represents a vital component of this process.

The adopted Plan update and response to comment document can be viewed or downloaded from the Department's website at www.state.nj.us/dep/dshw. A copy of the adopted Plan update and response to comment document can also be obtained from the Department upon the submission of a reproduction fee.