



Environmental Stewardship Through Recycling

Recycling is not only one of the more visible acts of environmental stewardship that the citizens of New Jersey participate in each day, but also one of the least understood in terms of overall impact on the environment and economy. Every day, tons of recyclable materials are collected from homes, businesses and institutions, processed into a market-ready form and transported by truck, rail and cargo ship to markets around the world. These recycled materials are then used as raw materials in various manufacturing processes and returned to the economic mainstream as products and packaging.

The environmental benefits associated with this recycling system are significant and numerous. By recycling metals, glass and paper, less material needs to be mined and fewer trees are cut down for use as raw materials. The use of recycled materials as raw materials rather than virgin materials results in significant energy savings, especially in the manufacturing sector. It also reduces air and water pollution.

Recycling also leads to reductions in greenhouse gas generation. The United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) calculated that on average, approximately 1.67 metric tons of carbon dioxide (CO₂) equivalents are avoided for every ton of municipal solid waste (i.e., waste generated by households, businesses and institutions) recycled. Of course, recycling also reduces the need for additional solid waste landfills and incinerators.



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On the economic front, recycling plays an important role in our state and national economy. Recycling adds over \$5.9 billion annually to New Jersey's economy and employs over 27,000 people in the Garden State. Nationally, the recycling industry continues to grow at a rate greater than that of the economy as a whole and employs over 1.1 million people across the country. Recycling programs also can reduce solid waste management costs for businesses and local jurisdictions.

Despite the recent decline in our state's recycling rates, New Jersey is still a nationally recognized leader in recycling. In 2006, almost 36% of the municipal solid waste generated in the Garden State was recycled, and over 54% of the total solid waste was recycled.



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With the recent passage of the Recycling Enhancement Act and its establishment of a funding source for statewide recycling efforts, the Department anticipates that recycling rates will start to climb over the next few years. This landmark piece of legislation will enable the Department to distribute needed funds to municipal and county recycling offices for program implementation, education and awareness campaigns, enforcement efforts and for the funding of recycling coordinator positions. The Recycling Enhancement Act also provides the Department with funds that can be used for grants to institutions of higher education for recycling demonstration, research or education, including professional training.

Recycling can only be successful if all sectors of society are involved, including government. As such, the Department recently revamped its own office recycling program so that more materials can be recycled by staff while on the job. DEP employees were recently provided new deskside recycling bins. These bins are a way to make recycling paper easier and to remind all DEP employees of the Department's ongoing commitment to the success of New Jersey's recycling program. The new bins at DEP are just the first step in the Department's plan for improving the office recycling programs at all state agencies.

New Jersey residents can also make a difference with recycling at home. Residents should learn their town's local recycling ordinances and comply with their requirements. Residents can also contact their local or county recycling coordinator if they believe more materials should be collected or if they have ideas to help improve the program. Encourage towns to provide recycling containers in public places, such as in parks and ball fields, just as they provide garbage receptacles, and organize local litter cleanup days. Another way for citizens to help is by contacting the manufacturers of various products and asking that they provide a recycling system for their products. This concept is called "product stewardship" and is embraced by the DEP.

Recycling is the responsibility of every citizen. For more information on how to get involved, visit the Department's recycling web page at www.nj.gov/recyclenj