



## **GUIDELINE 27 – IMPLEMENTING A RECYCLING PROGRAM**

North Dakota Department of Environmental Quality - Division of Waste Management

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Recycling is a fundamental part of any communities integrated waste management scheme. While recycling is not a complete answer to solving a municipal waste problem, a well-developed waste reduction and recycling program with a well operating inert waste landfill can save many North Dakota communities 25-50 percent of the increased costs of waste disposal. Many different recycling options are available, but to succeed some strategic planning is essential.

### **1. Establishing a Municipal Waste Task Force and Developing Local Expertise**

Local citizens and decision makers are often unfamiliar with the details of integrated waste management, including waste reduction and recycling. In order to build local expertise and to form a consensus on what needs to be done to better manage municipal solid wastes, many communities are organizing local task forces to study and make decisions regarding municipal solid wastes. Included on such a task force would be local officials, community groups, citizens, employees, collection and disposal system representatives, businesses interested in recycling and resource recovery, environmental groups, and any other parties interested in the solid waste management system. The task force should gain a background in solid waste issues and study the local political, institution, and economic realities for their community, county, and regional political jurisdictions.

The task force can identify waste management issues including the current and future waste streams, waste management practices, disposal needs, and determine goals and objectives. A study of various waste management alternatives and integration of alternatives, along with fostering public education and involvement, is necessary. A basic understanding of project financing is necessary before the development, implementation, and monitoring of an integrated waste management program. Once programs are put into practice, the task force can be invaluable in evaluating the new system and make recommendations on any further changes or additions. Involvement of a local solid waste task force is essential in ensuring local agreement in solid waste management alternatives and to build a common understanding and consensus on local options. Further information is available in the EPA publication "Decision Makers Guide to Solid Waste Management."

### **2. Understand and Identify Markets**

Finding an outlet or market for the recyclable materials is one of the first and most important tasks in starting a recycling program. Markets must be secured before collection of recyclables should begin. Programs should decide if they want to end market their collected materials or work with an existing recycling center within their region or the state.

To directly sell end market materials, a program should be fairly large. The program would need to identify the markets (often out-of-state), secure marketing agreements, have processing facilities (such as crushers, magnetic separators, sort lines, balers, etc.), have adequate storage to hold truckload or railcar load quantities of materials, have transportation arrangements worked out, and have adequate staffing. Because of the difficulties associated with direct marketing, most community programs may find it easier to market their materials with an existing regional recycling center. A listing of existing recycling operations in the state is available from the Department upon request.

Whichever way your program decides to market, it is important to discuss with your processor or end market what materials will be accepted, and how materials are to be prepared or separated at your collection program to make them most marketable. It's important to decide where your recyclable materials will go and how they should be separated, processed, and transported prior to starting your collection program or you may simply end up with a large supply of segregated trash which may have to be disposed in a landfill.

### **3. Evaluate Recycling Program Management**

Recycling program management can be accomplished by a variety of entities including municipal government operation, private for-profit entities or civic or local nonprofit organizations. In many instances, some sort of marriage between several entities works well. There is no magic method for developing a recycling program in any community. A variety of programs have proven successful. A local recycling program must be crafted to the needs of the community. One thing most successful programs have in common is a dynamic individual or group who can act as the force to foster the cooperation and coordination of the various entities which can be involved.

### **4. Evaluate Recycling Program Options**

Just as there is no magic method to manage a recycling program there is likewise no magic method that works best in all communities. A number of types of collection methods can be employed such as curbside collection, remote drop-off centers, or staffed multi-material collection centers. Several things should be kept in mind while evaluating options:

- Start small and build expertise and community support. Initially mistakes are bound to be made. Start recycling those materials which are most marketable and coincidentally make up a large part of the waste stream. Yard waste compost is easily marketed to area farmers, gardeners, or parks. There are currently good markets for most paper products and aluminum cans. As your program develops additional commodities can be added. Be sure to have storage space and a market for everything you collect.
- To encourage participation, make your program as convenient as possible. For example, drop-off locations should be at easily accessible, convenient locations. Studies have shown that curbside collection of recyclables on the same day as regular garbage collection provides for higher participation but is more expensive.

- The storage and collection system should keep recyclables separated and contamination-free to the best extent possible.

For smaller communities, a drop-off center, conveniently located and open one or two days a week and staffed by a volunteer group, will be most cost-effective and manageable. Also, smaller communities will find it beneficial to work together to get their recyclables centrally located. This can make transportation to or pickup from a regional processing center much more economical.

## **5. Foster Public Education and Participation**

Communication with the public and promotion of the program should be ongoing. Education and promotion programs should be planned with the community's needs in mind. Building successful participation requires explanation to the public of where, when, who, and how the program was decided upon. The public has a right and responsibility to understand the full costs and liabilities associated with the waste they generate.

Several steps should be taken in developing an education program. First, understand the different audiences you are trying to reach. What types of educational materials will get the most exposure and be most effective? Second, prepare a plan. The plan should include manageable goals. It should discuss main issues to be addressed, goals, activities, or events to accomplish each goal, resources available (funding, volunteers, community support) for activities or events and a timeline to coordinate the efforts with other programs, seasonal activities, or events. Your plan should focus on delivering the educational message, encouraging program participation, and funding the activities for the program. A wide variety of educational materials are available from the Department upon request.

Keep in mind that each community's needs are different and what may be successful in one case may not be what is needed in another. It's critical to involve your citizens and businesses in your program development. Ongoing evaluation of the system is important to adapt to new situations, evaluate new markets, and maximize efficiency of the system.

The North Dakota Department of Environmental Quality's Solid Waste Program has a wide range of information and expertise to help your community. The ND Solid Waste Recycling Association (NDSWRA) and local solid waste districts also play a key role in implementing changes in the system. Visit the NDSWRA website at <https://www.ndswra.org/>.