



Massachusetts Municipal Association

MMA BEST PRACTICES SERIES

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MMA Policy Committee on Energy and the Environment

Best Practice Recommendation: Municipal Solid Waste Diversion Programs

BEST PRACTICE: Reduce solid waste tonnage and promote sustainable alternatives to waste disposal by creating or partnering on municipal diversion programs, such as for organic waste and textiles.

Factors ranging from China's National Sword policy, which limits foreign exports of recyclable materials to China, to declining in-state landfill capacity, have placed substantial pressures on the solid waste and recycling markets in Massachusetts. Cities and towns have seen the costs for hauling recyclables, and in some cases trash, rise sharply over the past two years. Increasingly, municipal officials must explore alternatives to reduce solid waste tonnage in their communities, clean up the recycling stream, and lower costs.

Cities and towns at the forefront of municipal solid waste diversion have invested in programs that divert organic waste, textiles, and bulk or hazardous items from the waste stream. According to a study from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, organics such as food and yard waste make up as much as 30 percent of municipal solid waste, and textiles account for another 9 percent. In the case of organics, while Massachusetts has banned the disposal of commercial organic waste for businesses or institutions that dispose of more than 1 ton of these materials per week, no such restrictions or common alternatives exist for municipalities or their residents. By helping to divert these materials from the waste stream through composting or recycling, municipalities can realize positive benefits both for the environment and their bottom line.

The following are examples of municipalities that have invested in solid waste diversion initiatives:

- Newburyport is one community that has piloted a program to provide kitchen buckets and curbside carts to select households for organic waste collection and processing. During a two-year pilot, the city provided the receptacles to residents free of cost. According to the city's estimates, residents who participated in the pilot saw a 20 percent reduction in their solid waste tonnage by diverting organics for composting. Newburyport launched a website in conjunction with the program to educate residents on the environmental benefits of composting organics, and the distinction between what items are appropriate for backyard versus commercial-scale composting.
- Somerville has contracted with Simple Recycling to offer free curbside textile recycling pickup for residents.

(continued, next page)

Residents are given bright pink bags to be filled with discarded textiles and placed on the curb alongside trash and recycling bins on pickup day. According to the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection, 95 percent of textiles that are discarded (not including charitable donations of clothing) could instead be recycled or reused. Simple Recycling reports that it resells about 20 percent of the collected material to thrift stores, and the remaining 80 percent is either sold internationally or used as raw material for rags, industrial material, home insulation, carpet padding, or the automotive industry.

Resources:

- Waste Zero on Materials Diversion: <http://wastezero.com/our-solutions/materials-diversion>
- Republic Services on Organic Waste: www.republicservices.com/businesses/organic-waste
- Waste 360: www.waste360.com
- City of Newburyport Organic Waste Collection: <http://newburyportorganicspilot.wordpress.com>
- City of Somerville Curbside Textile Recycling:
www.somervillema.gov/departments/programs/curbside-textile-recycling-program