

Life Beyond Garbage *E-Bulletin*



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What do Three Planning Processes have in Common?

The June 2008 *Life Beyond Garbage* report provided substantial guidance toward three state planning groups who met during the fall. These planning groups submitted their recommendations to the Vermont Legislature in January. Many of the fall planning group recommendations mirrored the top priorities and overarching themes described in the *Life Beyond Garbage* report. A number of these recommendations will be considered as the new State Solid Waste State Plan is developed.

This newsletter highlights the top recommendations of these planning groups as well as the next steps to moving forward, the status of other ongoing projects around the state and region, and programs related to the priority materials identified in the *Life Beyond Garbage* report. In addition, we include a rundown of the status of Vermont's recycling markets and the impact on our recycling programs.

This update comes at a time of shrinking state resources. As part of the proposed budget cuts, staff in the state solid waste program may be cut. The need to collaborate, leverage resources, and develop partnerships has become ever more critical to moving waste prevention initiatives forward.

Life Beyond Garbage E-Bulletin

is produced by the Solid Waste Program. Our purpose is to continue to keep waste prevention stakeholders up to date about waste reduction planning and programs in Vermont. Let us know what articles you would like to see in future issues. To be placed on the mailing list, please contact:

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To learn more about the waste prevention stakeholder planning process and stay abreast of next steps, visit the Waste Prevention website at:

[http://
www.anr.state.vt.us/dec/
wastediv/R3/
DECwpPLAN.htm](http://www.anr.state.vt.us/dec/wastediv/R3/DECwpPLAN.htm)



Fall Planning Workgroups Completed

Over the fall and early winter, three planning groups met to:

- *Examine all Vermont regulations pertaining to composting and develop recommendations for the construction, operations, and permitting for composting facilities.* ([Compost Advisory Group](#))
- *Examine ANR's [Solid Waste Report to the Legislature, January 2008](#) and develop proposals and recommendations to implement and improve upon the report.* ([Solid Waste Working Group](#))
- *Examine the statewide economic structure of solid waste management, and the infrastructure needed to move forward to provide equitable solid waste management services statewide.* ([Solid Waste District Managers' Working Group](#))



We've highlighted the top recommendations from the working groups on page three. The complete reports are on the [Solid Waste Working Group's](#) webpage.

Recommendations from the Solid Waste Working Group

- Adopt product stewardship framework legislation;
- Implement programs and/or legislation to improve waste diversion (reuse, recycling & composting);
 - Mandatory pay as you throw
 - Mandatory parallel collection of recyclables
 - Bottle bill
 - Organics waste management
 - State purchasing
 - Data collection and analysis

Solid Waste Working Group Recommendations (cont.)

- Improve the solid waste infrastructure statewide;
- Complete a comprehensive solid waste management infrastructure needs assessment; and
- Explore the creation of a state-wide integrated solid waste management board.

What's Next?

- *The Vermont Legislature is taking up some of the recommendations in this year's session including bills related to composting and streamlining the solid waste program's permit process.*
- *The Agency of Natural Resources will help to publicize the state purchasing contract for green products to Vermont municipalities and schools.*
- *Further evaluation and research will still be needed to determine the best strategies to implement the recommendations in Vermont.*

The State Solid Waste Program has started the process of developing the next Vermont Solid Waste Management Plan (State Plan). The process will include public participation and a website with the State Plan planning activities. *Stay Tuned.*

Recommendations from the Compost Study Committee

Regulatory -- The Compost Study Committee recommended a five-tier regulatory proposal depending on the: size and type of the operation; the materials accepted; whether it is a residential, commercial, on-farm enterprise. The five tiers in order of increasing regulation are:

- De minimis or "backyard" composting
- on-farm composting
- small scale composting
- medium scale composting
- large Scale Composting

This session, state representatives introduced [H.145](#) - *A Bill Related to Composting*. It proposes exempting certain composting activities from Act 250 including: the production of smaller amounts of compost; compost principally produced on the farm; compost; principally used on the farm where it is produced; and compost made only from manure produced on the farm and clean, high-carbon bulking agents.

Education and Increasing Awareness -

The committee recommended a comprehensive, coordinated, public awareness campaign to increase awareness about the benefits of composting. To increase awareness within the composting community, the committee recommended annual workshops and trainings, to be coordinated with other assistance organizations.



Get involved:

The Council seeks partners and members. Contact VTPSC Coordinator, Jen Holliday jholliday@cswd.net if you are interested.



Updates from the Vermont Product Stewardship Council (VTPSC)

Since starting up last October, [Vermont Product Stewardship Council](#) members are working hard to build up the group's structure. Work includes completing a work plan, developing membership materials, and looking to see what legislation gets passed and deciding the Council's role in supporting or improving it.

The Council is developing its criteria for selecting products to target using an Extending Product Responsibility tool developed in Canada. Council members are ranking products based on a number of factors including their toxicity, volume, and cost. To date, the products ranked highest are electronics, compact fluorescent lamps, and paint.

Rather than seeking product by product legislation, the Council is planning to draft framework legislation to set up a structure outlining how the entire system would operate. Individual products could be added one at a time within the framework. According to Bill Sheehen, Executive Director of the [Product Policy Institute](#), four states are working on introducing framework legislation. California and Washington State have already introduced legislation, Oregon and Minnesota expect to do so in the next few weeks. At this time, the Vermont Council plans to move Vermont framework legislation forward after other states have passed it.

Changes to the Vermont Business Material Exchange

Vermont's Business Materials Exchange, [VBMX](#), just got a facelift. Using a grant from the Agency of Natural Resources, the Northeast Recycling Council (VBMX's newest managers) has added several features that make the service easier to use.

VBMX is a FREE matchmaking service that connects businesses who have reusable items they no longer need with other businesses that can use those items. Businesses can find homes for, or get hold of, such items as five-gallon buckets, fabric scraps, leftover insulation, and older (yet still functioning) computers and other electronics. The service helps Vermont businesses lower their trash fees as well as their purchasing costs.



What does the downturn in recycling markets mean for Vermont?



In the past few months, prices paid for our recyclables have taken a nose dive. For example, the Chittenden County materials recovery facility which processes about 50 percent of the state's recyclables, is getting about 70 percent less for newspaper, about 67 percent less for plastics numbers #1 and #2, and 90 percent less for metals than over the previous fiscal year. Mixed plastics numbers #3 through #7 dropped 100 percent. These plummeting price drops mirror the crash in our economy. Because Americans are buying less (fewer products), there is a lower demand for the recyclable materials collected in our communities.

Although the crash in markets for recyclable materials has been front page news, it is not as bad as it sounds. Markets are cyclical and prices have been low before. What's unique in this case is that they plummeted over such a short time. Luckily, the Chittenden facility sends most of its materials to markets in North America; the materials are still moving, albeit more slowly. According to Brian Wright, project manager at the Chittenden Solid Waste District, having long term contracts and high quality materials have helped to foster these stable markets.

Understanding some trends over the past decade helps us to better understand this crash in recycling markets. In his [EPA Webinar presentation](#) on recycling markets, Jerry Powell, Editor of Resource Recycling, explains why.

- Most of the growth from expanded demand for our recyclable materials came from developing countries, primarily China.
- Nearly all of the growth from expanded plastics recycling has been demand from China. Exports of recycled plastics have risen by 600 percent in the past decade.
- While the domestic paper recycling is decreasing, foreign paper recycling has increased.



According to Powell, lessons we learn from this downturn can help us lessen or abate any future downturns. He notes, "Recycling is part of the global economy, and we'll bleed just as other sectors will. We will rebound from the current market weakness when demand and supply moves toward balance. During this adjustment period, some players will be winners, some will be losers. Winners are the loyal suppliers, large suppliers, and suppliers of better quality material."

The market slump will create many questions:

Are all communities as truly committed as they say they are (in good times and bad times)?

Brian Wright of CSWD, asks if there are opportunities for smaller communities to cooperatively market their materials to larger recycling facilities?

Have federal and state agencies done enough to nurture a sustainable domestic market? Have businesses and institutions done enough in terms of using recycled products?

Our challenge is to determine what strategies in Vermont will promote and support our recycling programs. This would include:

- Continuing to focus on the waste hierarchy and seeking ways to prevent waste from being generated in the first place.



- Closing the loop - While Vermonters may be buying less, choosing recycled goods helps stimulate recycling markets.





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The Vermont Agency of Natural Resources, Department of Environmental Conservation, is an equal opportunity agency and offers all persons the benefits of participating in each of its programs and competing in all areas of employment regardless of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, or other nonmerit factors.

Growing Issue of Waste Pharmaceuticals

Vermont, along with many other states, is starting to address the growing waste stream of waste pharmaceuticals. During the past few years, Vermont municipalities, hospitals, and law enforcement agencies conducted pilot programs to collect unwanted pharmaceutical drugs. The police departments in the towns of St. Albans and Barre have offered to collect unwanted pharmaceuticals at their facilities. Through these programs, police departments would allow residents to bring in any waste pharmaceutical, place them in collection containers, and send them off for proper disposal. According to the Gary Taylor, Chief of police in St. Albans, *"the community response has been both positive and overwhelming. To date we have collected over 15,000 pills."*



On a State level, Vermont is helping private hazardous waste and medical waste contractors understand how to properly collect, transport, and dispose of unwanted waste pharmaceuticals. Many issues will still need to be addressed due to the hazardous nature of each individual pharmaceutical, including who collects them, from whom they are collected, and what the ultimate disposal will be. Managing these wastes is quickly becoming a resource- and time-intensive endeavor.

If pharmaceuticals are included as a universal waste - and their volume and nature argue for including them - then some of these issues may be alleviated. These wastes could then be managed using streamlined regulations rather than the more stringent management of hazardous wastes. Universal wastes currently include waste pesticides, batteries, and fluorescent lamps, to name a few. Vermont has submitted its comments in support of the addition of waste pharmaceuticals to the universal waste rule, as well as other areas of concern.

At the national level, the Product Stewardship Council has released a [draft issue statement](#) on waste pharmaceuticals to address this growing issue.

Any questions on Waste Pharmaceuticals can be directed to Thomas A. Benoit Sr, (802) 241-3472 or Thomas.benoit@state.vt.us.