

Recycling

Assembled by Sandy Larson, Terri McCormick & Caucus Staff For Further info email: slarson613@gmail.com

More than 70% of Michigan's waste stream is readily recyclable. However, only 15% is recycled. In 2014, 8.4 million tons of waste was disposed with 1.4 million tons of material being recycled in Michigan.¹ This is lower than all neighboring states and one of the lowest in the United States. Additionally, more pressure has been placed onto Michigan's recycle infrastructure as China, the largest receiver of recyclable materials, no longer accepts low quality recyclable materials from the United States.²

Economy	◆ Outsourcing waste management systems sends jobs overseas and loses revenue that could be captured through greater efficiency. To which, a circular economy could be considered as an alternative. ³
Public Health	◆ Hazards created from landfills, incinerators, toxic waste, and electronic waste, which also contribute to water and air pollution and degradation of landscape. ⁴
Natural Resources	◆ Americans resource consumption is so high, it would take 5 Earths to support the worlds population if everyone consumed the way we do. ⁵ Reusing, recycling, and reducing would assist in the prevention the dwindling of natural resources.

How Recycling Works

In the United States, recyclable waste is first placed into recycle bins. However, recycle bins are often contaminated with trash and must be sorted first before resources can be extracted. This sorting process can either be done by the resident or by a company upon receipt, much of which was previously done by companies in China.

China's National Sword Policy

The national sword policy has closed the door to China receiving low quality recyclable waste from overseas and this is changing the way recycling works in the United States. The City of Westland was a role model in recycling for years with a 78% residential participation rate due to an innovative rewards program. However, they are now sending recyclable waste to landfills because of the skyrocketing rate charged by their provider, GFL Recycling of Toronto, which can no longer send materials to China.⁶ Other communities utilize regional providers, such as Southeastern Oakland County Resource Recovery Authority (SOCRRA), who are still able to find buyers for recyclable materials.

Solutions

Michigan has a statewide goal of tripling its current recycling rate from 15 percent to 45 percent. This has a potential positive economic impact of \$400 million.⁵ To achieve this goal, five priority initiatives have been established:

- ◆ Revising Part 115 Solid Waste Laws
- ◆ Launching the Re:Source Market Development initiative
- ◆ Having state office buildings leading by example in recycling
- ◆ Developing a statewide Education and Engagement Campaign
- ◆ Obtaining funding for recycling and solid waste management



Other Solutions include:

- ◆ Expanding the Bottle Deposit Law, such as House Bill 5306 and Senate Bill 701⁹
- ◆ Implementing Pay As You Throw programs, which charge based on amount thrown away^{10,11}
- ◆ Introducing Citizen education programs - Recycling Raccoons is a high profile series of reminders on social media (Twitter) of what can and cannot be recycled.¹² Local programs likewise are upping their consumer education; SOCRRA (Southeastern Oakland County Resource Recovery Authority) has an app called Waste Wizard that will look up items and tell you how disposal is handled: whether curbside, at SOCRRA, or as trash.¹³

Emmet County has developed a successful recycling program through the use of state grants, a 2 year increase in the millage, and through a “pay as you throw” program which charges residents for their waste. This rose their recycling rate to 42%.⁷ The City of Novi has also used best practices and has achieved a recycling rate of 40%.⁸ Such successful programs could be replicated statewide.

Key Resources

Michigan Recycles	www.michiganrecycles.org
Recycling Raccoons	www.recyclingraccoons.org
Michigan Materials Marketplace	www.michigan.materialsmarketplace.org
Waste Wizard	www.socrra.org/waste-wizard
World Health Organization	www.who.int

¹ “Measuring Recycling in the State of Michigan” *Michigan Recycling Coalition*, michiganrecycles.org/reports/

² “U.S. Recycling Industry Is Struggling To Figure Out A Future Without China” *Michigan Radio*, michanradio.org/post/us-recycling-industry-struggling-figure-out-future-without-china

³ “What is a Circular Economy” *Michigan Materials Marketplace*, <https://michigan.materialsmarketplace.org/the-circular-economy>

⁴ “Waste and human health: Evidence and needs” *World Health Organization*, November 2015, http://www.euro.who.int/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/317226/Waste-human-health-Evidence-needs-mtg-report.pdf

⁵ “Michigan Recycling Initiatives” *Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy*, https://www.michigan.gov/egle/0,9429,7-135-3312_4123_73503_84958---,00.html

⁶ “Surging costs cause some Michigan cities to rethink recycling programs” *Bridge Magazine*, <https://www.bridgemi.com/michigan-environment-watch/surging-costs-cause-some-michigan-cities-rethink-recycling-programs>

⁷ “Recycling Stories: Emmet County” *Michigan Recycling Coalition*, www.michiganrecycles.org/recycling-stories-emmet-county/

⁸ “Recycling Stories: City of Novi” *Michigan Recycling Coalition*, <https://www.michiganrecycles.org/recycling-stories-city-of-novi/>

⁹ “Michigan Democrats propose expanding bottle deposits to all beverages except milk” *Mlive*, <https://www.mlive.com/news/2019/12/michigan-democrats-propose-expanding-bottle-deposits-to-all-beverages-except-milk.html>

¹⁰ “Pay-As-You-Throw” *EPA*, February 2016 <https://archive.epa.gov/wastes/conservation/tools/payt/web/html/index.html>

¹¹ “Municipal Solid Waste Factsheet” *University of Michigan*, <http://css.umich.edu/factsheets/municipal-solid-waste-factsheet>

¹² *Recycling Raccoons*, <https://recyclingraccoons.org/>

¹³ “Waste Wizard” *SOCRRA*, <https://www.socrra.org/waste-wizard>

¹⁴ “Sustainable Materials Management: Non-Hazardous Materials and Waste Management Hierarchy” *EPA*, <https://www.epa.gov/smm/sustainable-materials-management-non-hazardous-materials-and-waste-management-hierarchy>