

Municipal/Regional Capacity Building Workgroup
Summary of Recommendations based on 2-26-09 and 3-16-09 Stakeholder Meetings

Nearly 30 people participated in the two meetings on building municipal capacity and regionalization to increase recycling in February and March 2009. Below is a compilation of the key messages and recommendations that were voiced at these meetings.

The first section covers actions and initiatives that can be implemented with few additional financial resources. Section II covers programs that will require financial support and/or would require more time to implement.

Section One: Short Term/Lower Cost Recommendations

1. Information sharing: Only the largest communities have full time recycling staff; in most, a health board or public works staff person handles various municipal functions, one of which is recycling. Therefore, it is critical for recycling staff to be able to access a broad range of information from their peers and MassDEP in an efficient manner. This enables them to be more productive at their jobs by implementing best practices, learning from their peers, and educating decision-makers more effectively. MassDEP should implement the following strategies to increase municipal stakeholders efficient access to information:

- **Create website where municipal/regional staff can share files** (presentations, educational flyers, artwork, RFPs, bid specs, signage, reports, etc.) and not have to reinvent the wheel.
- **Produce online reuse/recyclopedia directory.** Four regional groups and the Springfield MRF communities produce directories annually. Ideally these would be online and available statewide.
- **Provide information on producer/retailer take-back programs** (electronics, batteries, cell phones, ink cartridges, etc) via regular updates to municipal stakeholders. This info could also be posted as part of a statewide “recyclopedia”.
- **Promote use of existing toolkits and templates more consistently** (such as the Municipal Waste Reduction Toolkit).
- **Provide access to a “marketing specialist” for design and review of outreach material for a variety of audiences.**
- **Facilitate more dialogue on recycling with key stakeholders.** Local elected officials and municipal CEOs need to better understand the financial and environmental savings associated with recycling. The Massachusetts Municipal Association should also be engaged in this dialogue.
- **Provide “short money” for piloting small scale innovative projects,** the results of which can be documented and shared with others.

2. Training: Turnover is relatively high in municipal recycling positions, particularly in smaller communities, in part because staff is usually assigned to multiple programs and may be pulled off to work in other areas as needed. Recycling and waste management is also a dynamic industry with new technologies, strategies and regulations emerging each year. In communities with dedicated (full or part-time) recycling staff, job functions and responsibilities are often poorly defined and the only training is through “trial by fire”. A growing number of states provide a training curricula and programs for local government recycling staff. Recommendations for MassDEP include:

- Continue to hold workshops on key and cutting edge topics: Municipal solid waste contracting, single stream recycling, recycling enforcement, Pay-as-you-Throw, regional contracting, etc.
- Provide training for transfer station operators and hazardous waste collection center staff, including tours of recycling facilities.
- Create a professional certification program for municipal recycling coordinators and managers

3. Procurement of goods and services through state contracts: Municipalities depend on a variety of state contracts for recycling and composting equipment, HHW collection, PAYT bags, e-waste recycling and more. These contracts are a huge time-saver for municipal officials. Recommendations for additional state contracts and materials include:

- Offer wider range of recycling and composting containers for use in public spaces, schools, municipal buildings, and curbside collection programs. (see meeting notes from 3-16-09 meeting for detail)
- Offer yard waste/brush grinding services, pharmaceuticals collection, and sharps collection and containers.
- Add containers for organics collection (at drop-off centers, commercial, and residential).
- Provide equipment such as compactors for cardboard and balers on state contract.
- Provide guidance or procurement of biodegradable food service ware for school cafeterias.
- Provide a contract template or operating standards for e-waste collection and processing to enable municipalities to assess the qualifications of various vendors that are not required to hold permits in Massachusetts for handling of e-waste.

4. Increase waste ban enforcement: There was not consensus on this topic. Views expressed included:

- The commercial sector should be targeted to level the playing field between municipalities, who implemented comprehensive recycling programs in 90s, and the commercial generators who have gone unregulated on recycling.
- Municipal loads **should** be subject to inspection and enforcement; the Department Approved Recycling Program has run its course and should be retired.
- Private haulers serving residential customers in rural and suburban communities should be enforced against to increase recycling services to these sectors.

5. Regionalizing Services: There is growing interest in regional approaches to solid waste and recycling issues. However, most municipalities lack the staff resources needed to coordinate successful partnerships on either an informal or long-term basis. This is why DEP has funded start-up staff for regional groups in the past (starting with the Solid Waste Management Act of 1987 that led to the formation of a number of regional solid waste districts in Western Massachusetts). More recently, DEP's Municipal Assistance Coordinators have fostered regional collaboratives for HHW collection, yard waste/brush grinding, solid waste/recycling service contracts, and regional recycling and reuse centers.

In almost 30 rural communities today, residents have no access to municipal trash and recycling services; multiple haulers compete for residential customers and provide little or no

recycling. Part of the problem is that smaller haulers lack access to recycling drop-off facilities. With an average of seven haulers operating in each community, route density is low, making the service expensive to provide. The result: residents are paying high rates for trash collection and no recycling. MassDEP should take the following steps:

- Provide funding for development of additional regional “reuse and recycling” centers (like Blackstone and Northbridge).
- Provide incentives for municipalities with existing transfer stations to accept recyclables and waste from small haulers
- Address existing barriers to these activities in MassDEP’s permitting requirements.
- Create an incentive for communities that use regional approaches for solid waste management or that host a regional recycling facility by giving preference in the “cherry sheet” local aid formula.
- Recognize municipalities for innovative regional approaches through awards and case studies.
- Provide additional technical assistance in the form of more Municipal Assistance Coordinators to identify opportunities and work with municipalities on regionalization.

Section Two: Longer Term/Higher Cost Recommendations

1. Incentive/challenge program (like the Municipal Recycling Incentive Program). In addition to providing financial incentives, the MRIP criteria functioned as a set of standards by which municipalities could measure their progress on waste reduction and recycling. MRIP also enhanced the ability of municipal recycling staff to convince local decision-makers to make recycling program improvements as referenced in the program criteria. MassDEP should:

- Introduce an MRIP-like program with incentives and program requirements that drive innovation and program effectiveness
- Create a competitive tier and a non-competitive (i.e., block grant) tier. The non-competitive tier would set minimum standards for the municipal recycling program. The competitive tier would reward communities for increasing diversion.
- Explore different metrics for performance assessment and/or rewards (e.g. the per-ton payment for organics diversion would be higher than for paper or containers).
- Require municipalities that earn MRIP payments to use the funds for recycling and waste reduction purposes.
- Determine a fair system for regional solid waste entities to participate in an MRIP-type program.

2. Invest in new program implementation: Communities are eager to take advantage of technologies such as automated trash and recycling collection and single stream recycling. The entry costs can be prohibitive because of the high cost of wheeled carts. MassDEP should help reduce this barrier by:

- Providing a one-time per-household payment (similar to PAYT start-up grants) for the purchase of wheeled carts for single stream recycling or automated trash collection

- Facilitating long-term contracts between municipalities and MRFs to insure consistent operating standards and reliable markets.
- Providing education materials to support roll-out of these programs.
- Provide greater incentives for municipalities to adopt Pay-As-You-Throw programs (e.g. increase per household payment from \$4 to \$20).
- Mandate PAYT programs through statewide legislation, thereby eliminating the single greatest obstacle: local politics.

3. Provide additional Municipal Assistance Coordinators with multi-year project assistance: MACs serve as “change agents” in communities and help engage local decision-makers in critical dialogue on waste reduction. They provide hard data on innovative programs that have succeeded in other communities (geographic neighbors and/or demographic “relatives”). Implementing significant changes in waste reduction programs can be a multi-year process. Key changes:

- Increase the number of MAC hours available to communities each year
- Provide multi-year technical assistance for longer-term projects so that a re-application and scoping process is not required each year.
- Provide additional hands-on assistance for schools to get recycling programs up and running.

4. School Recycling

Implementing sustainable school recycling programs is a surprisingly challenging endeavor. Many school programs are launched by an energetic teacher or student environmental club. When these champions move on or leave the school, the recycling program often falls apart, leaving school administrators reluctant to “try it again”. Buy-in from the administration to the custodial staff is critical to a sustainable program. MassDEP should:

- Utilize the existing Green Team program to provide significantly more recycling containers and compost bins to schools
- Create a “greening your school” check-list (like a L.E.E.D.) to help implement initiatives over time.
- Offer in-kind technical assistance grants (through MACs) on a two year timeline; MassDEP’s fiscal year driven grant cycle is an impediment for schools since they operate on an academic year schedule.
- Address barriers to increased purchase of recycled copy paper in schools
- Provide additional recycling container options on state contract (appropriate for schools).
- Re-purpose curbside recycling bins for school use when a community switches to carts for single stream recycling.
- Produce guidance/training on school-based food waste diversion programs

5. Organics Diversion

A few communities have implemented drop-off programs at their transfer stations and recycling yards where residents can bring food waste for composting. Even in rural communities, many residents are not willing to compost food waste in their backyard compost bins. Organics processing capacity is spotty and unreliable, which makes collection programs vulnerable when sites are suddenly shut down. To foster opportunities

for curbside collection of food waste and increase drop-off food waste programs in rural areas, MassDEP should:

- Provide incentives and assistance to foster the development of regional organics facilities that can accept larger quantities of material on a long term basis.
- Provide funds for pilot residential organics collection programs
- Work with interested municipalities on the feasibility of incorporating food waste into existing municipal leaf and yard waste composting sites.
- Help facilitate long-term processing contracts for groups of municipalities that want to implement curbside organics collection.
- Ban disposal of organics (initially from the commercial sector).
- Provide increased assistance to schools to implement food waste collection.

6. Address underserved sectors (multi-family, subscription hauler customers, small businesses):

There are still substantial gaps in recycling service to residents of multi-family buildings (including public housing where virtually no recycling is provide), and for residents that either choose to subscribe to private trash collection instead of using the local transfer station, and residents that have no choice but to use private haulers because their community has no trash or recycling services at all. Small businesses are challenged to find economical recycling services as well. These groups share one thing in common: a largely unregulated hauling community without uniform standards or a price structure to incentivize recycling. While local boards of health have broad regulatory authority over solid waste and recycling activities, many do not have the time or the political will to use this authority to its full extent. Suggested steps that MassDEP should take:

- Facilitate regional dialogue with municipalities and haulers to identify common goals, barriers and incentives to increase recycling.
- Develop and promote a standardized municipal contract with haulers.
- Provide recycling containers for new multi-family programs and subscription hauler programs (through municipality).
- Share model hauler permits, ordinances and bylaws on mandatory recycling
- Fund recycling enforcement coordinators for larger communities or fund part-time coordinators for two towns (more than two towns sharing a coordinator is problematic).

6. Reuse: there's broad consensus about the need for programs that support reuse and exchange of goods from the residential, municipal and business sectors. Because this topic cuts across broad stakeholder groups, a separate "Reuse Strategies" meeting will be held this spring.