

MassDEP Reduce & Reuse (R&R) Workgroup Virtual Meeting

Wednesday, April 1, 2020 | 11:00 AM – 1:00 PM

Creating a Culture of Source Reduction & Reuse in Massachusetts

Special Guest Presentation by Adam Minter

Meeting Summary

Welcome & Introductions

Erin Victor, MassDEP welcomed and thanked everyone for joining the virtual discussion. She then outlined the meeting agenda:

- 11 AM – 11:30 AM: Insights into the global secondhand industry, Adam Minter
- 11:30 AM – 12:00 PM – Q&A with Adam Minter
- 12PM – 1PM – Discussion: Creating a culture of reduce/reuse/repair/share in Massachusetts

She reminded anyone who was not able to join the kick-off meeting in February that the presentation slides and meeting summary are available on MassDEP's website [here](#).

Special Guest Presentation - Adam Minter: Insights into the Global Secondhand Industry

Erin introduced Adam Minter, a journalist and author who has been covering the global reuse and recycling industry for over twenty years. Adam Minter's newest book "[Secondhand: Travels in the New Global Garage Sale](#)" is focused on the secondhand/reuse industry.

The presentation slides can be found [here](#), a recording of Adam Minter's presentation can be found [here](#).

Q and A with Adam followed the presentation. Topics discussed are briefly noted below:

- Reuse means "extracting value" from old items in most parts of the world, but not in the U.S. where we don't typically adopt this practice (e.g recovering parts from old computers). We need to reassess how we "assess value".
- We need to be developing repair skills in the U.S. economy; there are markets for salvaged parts from electronics in New England, but it takes some searching to find them.
- Developing skills development and job training programs to support repair is needed in Mass. Lack of skilled labor is a barrier.
- Working with voc-tech schools to develop more repair-based enterprises would create a new labor force and could generate revenue for schools if they sold repaired items.
- While more U.S. electronics recyclers are starting to recover parts for reuse in the U.S. over the past few years, we also need to recognize that global trade in used goods is an important part of the future of the secondhand economy.
- The salvaged parts business in the U.S is mostly being created out of the diaspora, but it's largely invisible to most of us. What can local and state govt do to support growth in this area?
Answer: Provide support to small businesses in our communities and support Right to Repair legislation (for example in MA: <https://malegislature.gov/Bills/191/H218>)

Discussion: Creating a culture of reduce/reuse/repair/share in Massachusetts

Attachment: [Slidedeck](#)

Erin took a poll on who attended the kickoff meeting:



This discussion was facilitated by Rachel Smith of MassDEP, using insights from Adam Minter’s presentation and results of the pre-meeting survey conducted in February.

Attachment: [survey results](#)

Erin provided a brief background about the R&R Workgroup for first-time attendees: This group will be meeting over the next year to create a Reduce and Reuse Action Plan for Massachusetts as outlined in the draft [2020-2030 Solid Waste Master Plan](#). The action plan will be similar to the [Organics Action Plan](#), outlining actions to move forward and meet our state-wide solid waste reduction goals.

Barriers to source reduction & reuse

Slides showed barriers that were identified in the kickoff meeting and the pre-meeting survey. See slides [here](#) (slide 5). Erin then opened up the discussion for comments and ideas on any additional barriers that were missing. Barriers identified in the meeting:

- Disappearance of repair shops, tailors, cobblers
- A lack of skilled labor for repairs
- Limited software support is part of Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs) planned obsolescence strategy
- Need for a point person or agency/organization to take the lead on reuse
- Lack of education about where our things come from and where they go, and why it’s important to reduce consumption and disposal
- Industry lobbyists that spend considerable amounts of time, money, and resources blocking and lobbying against source reduction and reuse policies and legislation
- Production and manufacturing industries are strong resisters to the reduce and reuse principles
- Misconception that reuse means germs and lack of cleanliness (i.e. current ban against reusable bags in grocery stores due to COVID-19)
- Increase in food delivery services that include single-use plastics
- New items are perceived as better than used or shows that a person is “well-off”; secondhand has a secondhand reputation

- Overcoming perceptions that used/refurbished is “less than” or inferior is critical. Our thinking as a society needs to revert to our roots of “conserving” (the original meaning of “conservative”)
- Misconception that trash is free - need to increase understanding of the costs associated with trash and consumption
- Lack of storage space is a common barrier to greater furniture and household goods reuse and redistribution. The demand from low income families is there, but it’s not being met. And yet huge volumes of still usable goods are trashed each day since there is nowhere to store items awaiting repair or resale.
- Lack of systems in place required for creating a culture that regularly chooses source reduction and reuse

Strategies for promoting source reduction & reuse

Erin moved the discussion towards strategies that can help move Massachusetts overcome some of the identified barriers to create a more robust reduce, reuse, repair culture in Massachusetts. [Slides 7 & 8](#) showed strategies identified in the pre-meeting survey and kickoff meeting. Workgroup participants identified additional strategies to consider in the development of the Reduce & Reuse Action Plan:

- Help create a secondhand trade in Mass that connects supply with demand
- Have more options for getting rid of useful things that aren’t easily recyclable and cannot be accepted by charities; spreading information about places that will accept these items
- Encourage “junk days” where residents can leave things outside for others to take and informal swapping and sharing networks like Buy Nothing Facebook Groups, Craigslist and Freecycle
- Promote solutions like in Melrose, MA where they pair a community yard sale day followed by a zero-waste event so residents can sell items and then give them away or swap unsold items with vendors or other residents.
- Promote informal swapping & sharing networks online and on social media like Buy Nothing Facebook Groups or Craigslist
- Better leverage government procurement by connecting surplus offices with state procurement offices
- Promote sharing information i.e. how to hold fix-it clinics & repair cafes
- Share more information at local transfer stations so staff can help encourage reduce and repair with residents
- Show that reuse in businesses is possible with examples like the Coffee Cup Collective and Grainmakers’ reusable container program; develop more education campaigns like Recycle Smart MA to fill that void and have businesses lead the setup of these systems & build the culture of reuse
- Expand fix-it clinics, shift focus to repairing items and maintaining a shared public property/community asset; transition to a circular economy and mandate item durability by adding durability language to RFPs and RFQs
- Reinforce & reinvigorate libraries as core institutions; connect with technical schools to promote repair of various equipment and selling these items to help fund programs at the schools
- Defining who is responsible for repairing items from lending libraries, library of things, if the item breaks or gets lost
- Work with voc-tech schools to develop more repair-based enterprises to create a new labor force and generate revenue for schools if they sold repaired items.

- Developing skills development and job training programs to support repair is needed in Mass.
- Support Right to Repair legislation - this is the most important thing a state can do to jump start the reuse/repair economy in Mass. In Minnesota, RtR is a pro-business movement.
- Identify who is actively working against Reduce & Reuse legislation in MA and start a dialogue with legislators (local and state) about reuse/repair.
- Identify ways to address barriers to reuse from perceptions about Bring Your Own (BYO) take-out containers, coffee cups, etc? There's a contradiction in having salad bars are likely a greater source of germ transmission.
- With increased delivery of take-out food to homes during COVID, we need to push back so we don't lose ground.
- Remind the public that we can't "recycle our way out of this mess". Recycling isn't enough; it's an end-of-tail pipe solution and while necessary, we need to address actions that impact waste up the chain.
- Leverage State and local governments to help drive demand for refurbished items like pre-owned, refurbished office equipment, office furniture, etc.
- Mandate durability through institutional procurement
- A statewide outreach campaign to promote reuse, repair, share could raise awareness of the benefits (social, environmental, economic) of this and support a new ethos – "it's cool to reuse"

Related Strategies outlined in the Draft Solid Waste Master Plan:

Erin thanked attendees for their ideas and reminded all that this process is an iterative conversation and will continue to be refined. She encouraged all participants to continue to send ideas through email (to Erin.Victor@mass.gov) in between workgroup meetings. She then outlined some of the relevant strategies identified in the draft Solid Waste Master Plan:

- Continuing MassDEP's micro-grant that offers up to \$5000 to assist nonprofits, businesses, and sometimes municipalities grow their reuse, repair, or share operations/programs
- Incentives for municipality investments in reuse, reduce, and repair
- Creation of an online calculator to qualify value in reuse, repair, share for municipality use
- Development of an online tool to connect residents with reuse and repair info and events
- Continuing with Recycle Smart MA's educational campaign – plug that the last newsletter focused on acknowledging that we're cooped up at home but we can still reduce, reuse, and recycle – check out the latest newsletter [here](#)
- Posting Recycle Smart MA messages and ideas about reduce, reuse, and repair on social channels (Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter) and recyclesmartma.org

Community Engagement Ideas:

Erin asked how to best engage the broader community to garner more input and support for the R&R Action Plan, and how to get the general public excited about source reduction and reuse. Comments included:

- Creating a presentation like this meeting's (or another version of it) that local reuse groups could present to discuss reuse and repair around the state
- Showing relevant documentaries and using that content to promote education and get the conversation going, an example is the [Reuse! Because You Can't Recycle The Planet documentary](#) from R&R workgroup member, Alex Eves (which he has now made available for free online).

- Finding a legislator that backs the Reuse and Reduce Group and is willing to talk about it publicly
- Spreading word to communities through listservs and social media
- Working on easily accessible, creative how-to videos that show programs in place, so communities can replicate events like fix-it clinics and other reuse programs
- Recruiting local celebrities or admired politicians to spread the message
- Turn negative press about recycling into positive press about reduce and reuse

Next Meeting:

Wednesday, May 27, 2020 from 11:00 AM – 1:00 PM. Location – TBD

Topic: Continue discussion on creating a culture of reduce and reuse; discuss strategies for expanding reuse and repair of household durable goods

Future meetings will take place on the fourth Wednesday of each month (unless noted otherwise).

Reminders & Action Items:

- Join the [Reduce & Reuse Network](#). This is a listserv for anyone interested in source reduction and reuse regulations, policies, and programs in Massachusetts. Those who are interested can join by emailing ReduceReuseNetwork-MA+subscribe@googlegroups.com and share on the listserv by emailing reducereusenetwork-ma@googlegroups.com
- Review the map of [Libraries of Things and Swap Sheds in Massachusetts](#) that are available online for residents to connect to these places in their communities. If any locations or programs are missing, please email erin.victor@mass.gov
- Complete a post-meeting survey that can help MassDEP facilitate these virtual meetings