

**Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP)**  
**Organics Subcommittee Meeting Summary**  
**10:00 AM – 12:00 PM, August 6, 2020**  
**Held via Webinar**

John Fischer of MassDEP delivered a presentation that is posted along with this meeting summary on the MassDEP Organics Subcommittee web page. The meeting agenda is listed here for reference:

- Solid Waste Master Plan Update
- COVID 19 Food Waste Impacts
- Food Waste Program & Data Updates
- Waste Ban Development Schedule
- Draft Organics Action Plan by section

Participants added the following comments and questions.

COVID 19 Food Waste Impacts

Q: Are organics recycling facilities seeing any increase in contamination from items like gloves and masks related to COVID?

A: A recycling facility operator commented that they are seeing more of this contamination in the recycling stream, but not really in the organics stream. Overall recycling volume is steady, there has just been a shift from commercial to residential tons. On the organics side, that volume has been down due to a drop in collection from colleges and universities and entertainment venues. As with recycling, one compost operator noted an increase in residential volumes and noted that they have not seen increased contamination.

MassDEP added that there will be some uncertainty and likely continued reduced generation from certain commercial sectors going forward, particularly in the fall as colleges operate remotely or through hybrid teaching models. MassDEP also has seen increased interest in home composting during this period.

Q: Has there been any significant change in contamination and material quality with more people working from home or not being on campus?

A: MassDEP has continued to emphasize reducing contamination and improving material quality through our Recycle Smart and Recycling IQ Kit programs. In addition, we have used outreach channels through RecyclingWorks in Massachusetts to encourage employers to share this outreach and guidance with employees who are working remotely. This approach also could be used to encourage composting at home.

C: The City of Boston has seen an increase in litter associated with COVID, particularly masks and gloves. They are working on outreach to encourage use of reusable masks. While Boston Water and Sewer Commission has not reported an increase in these materials in the sewer system, that remains a concern as well.

C: MassDEP also noted that disposable wipes should not be flushed down the drain, nor placed in recycling or organics collections. They should be disposed of in the trash.

Q: What types of commercial entities is MassDEP seeing non-compliance from relative to the commercial organics ban?

A: We do not have all of the data prepared here, but some of the sectors we have seen non-compliance from include food processors and manufacturers, grocery stores, and restaurants. This non-compliance has been most significant from food processors, manufacturers and distributors. That is not necessarily because their compliance is so poor, but rather because they can be such large generators. In some cases, these generators have had diversion programs in place, but are missing some food waste that gets placed in the trash.

Q: Is the animal feed going to a feed processing facility, or more direct to feed like pig farms?

A: We do have one animal feed processing operation, but most of it is going directly to animal feed, like pig farms. However, MassDEP receives limited, informal reporting from this sector.

Q: Was the significant decrease in composting due to material shifting from compost to anaerobic digestion (AD)?

A: This was partially due to a reporting error that overstated compost tonnage at one point, but there also has been some shift from material going from compost to AD. Some compost operations have closed or reduced the amount of food waste they take, which has reduced that tonnage. There also has been some shift with more material going through de-packaging operations, which is typically sent to AD. A hauler commented that this may also be due to the cost to haul material to compost sites, depending on where they are located.

C: Relative to environmental justice engagement, people really like to get involved with recycling and composting, regardless of what language they speak. If we can reach out to more of these communities and connect with community champions, that could make a big difference.

Q: What companies received the RBDG grants for glass?

A: MassDEP has awarded two RBDG grants for glass – one to JM Equipment in Freetown and one to the Casella MRF in Auburn. JM Equipment purchased crushing equipment to produce processed glass aggregate. Casella purchased equipment to clean the glass stream from their MRF. MassDEP has another RBDG award for glass pending now.

Q: How much of the AD capacity is food waste dedicated digesters vs. wastewater treatment plant digesters?

A: Most of the digesters accepting food material in Massachusetts are co-digesting food materials with manure from cows on dairy farms. The capacity shown in the slides represents

the capacity available for food materials. We have one digester based at a waste-water treatment plant and one that is a stand-alone food waste digester.

Q: Would it be useful to distinguish between material coming from Massachusetts vs. outside Massachusetts in facility reports?

A: This may be included within some existing reporting but, if it is not, we could consider adding it.

Q: Have we considered gathering data on how AD outputs are used?

A: MassDEP wants to understand what the markets are and ensure that adequate markets are available and should be able to gather this data.

C: A participant expressed support for the proposal to explore funding models for food donation more sustainable. Many of these organizations face financial challenges.