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

### Topic: Single Use Packaging

Wednesday, October 28, 2020 | 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM | Meeting Summary

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The R&R Working Group is a forum for discussion of source reduction and reuse regulations, policies, and programs in Massachusetts. The group was established to help in the development of a MassDEP Strategic Reduce and Reuse Action Plan as outlined in the [2030 Solid Waste Master Plan](#). To learn more about the working group and find past meeting materials, visit: [MassDEP Reduce & Reuse Working Group](#)

This meeting was held virtually and facilitated by Erin Victor, Environmental Analyst, MassDEP [erin.victor@mass.gov](mailto:erin.victor@mass.gov). A total of 80 people participated in the 10/28/2020 meeting.

#### Agenda

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- 10 AM – Welcome & Background – Erin Victor, MassDEP
- 10:10 AM – Sarah Nichols, Sustainable Maine Program Director, [Natural Resources Council of Maine](#)
- 10:30 AM – Miriam Gordon, Policy Director, [UPSTREAM Solutions](#)
- 10:50 AM – Q&A with Sarah Nichols and Miriam Gordon
- 11:15 AM – Breakout Rooms: Solutions to Single Use Packaging
  1. Solutions for your local community
  2. Solutions for your business or institution
  3. Solutions for your elementary or secondary school
- 11:45 AM – Report out from breakout rooms
- 11:55 AM – Announcements – Erin Victor, MassDEP
- 12:00 PM – Adjourn

#### Presentations

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- Welcome and Background – [Presentation Slides](#)  
*Erin Victor, MassDEP*
- Single Use Disposable Packaging – [Presentation Slides](#)  
*Sarah Nichols, Sustainable Maine Program Director, [Natural Resources Council of Maine](#)*
- Reduce and Reuse – we CAN do this! – [Presentation Slides](#)  
*Miriam Gordon, Policy Director, [UPSTREAM Solutions](#)*
- [Presentation Recording and Q&A session with Sarah Nichols and Miriam Gordon](#)

## Summary of Breakout Room Discussions

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Reduce & Reuse Working group participants were invited to participate in smaller group discussions focused on identifying barriers and solutions to reducing single use packaging in Massachusetts.

Groups focused on:

1. Solutions for your local community (municipal leaders, advocates, NGOs)
2. Solutions for your business or institution
3. Solutions for your elementary or secondary school

### 1. Solutions for your local community

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Given the overwhelming interest in discussing solutions at the local community level, we broke this discussion into two breakout groups.

#### *Local: Breakout Room A*

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**Facilitator:** Brooke Nash, Municipal Waste Reduction Program Branch Chief, MassDEP

**Note Taker:** Sharon Kishida, Northeast District 2 Municipal Assistance Coordinator, MassDEP

#### What Are the Barriers?

- Single use packaging is everywhere and local communities have just a small area of influence
- Plastic packaging is CHEAP
- People are shy about bringing reusable containers to food establishments or grocery stores.
- With COVID-19, boards of health (BOHs) are still very strict with the use of reusable items
- People are not comfortable with mandating reusable or imposing fees for single use items
- Misconception that compostable food service ware is a solution to single use; it's not; few composting operations want it; decomposition is very slow.

#### Ideas

- Remove barriers in state public health codes and local Board of Health codes that limit or prevent use of reusables – Examples:
  - California's AB 619 - modified their Retail Food Code
  - Berkeley, CA's Single Use Foodware & Litter Reduction ordinance.
- State laws banning single use bags, (Maine, polystyrene take-out containers (Vermont) and local ordinances to eliminate single use packaging in foodservice (proposed in Attleboro and Northampton).
- State Extended Producer Responsibility law for packaging, pending in Maine
- Community support of reusables strategies:
  - Give incentives to restaurants to use reusable, like Usefull- <https://www.usefull.us/>
  - Eat-in dining must use reusables: <https://www.upstreamsolutions.org/resources>
  - <https://www.rethinkdisposable.org/>
  - <https://www.unpackedliving.com/blogs/news/zero-waste-massachusetts-directory>
  - <http://www.massgreen.org/reducing-plastic-bags.html>
- Regions have recycling centers available for reuse and recycling of specific packaging

## The Conversation:

- Molly Ettenborough, Newburyport: due to COVID-19, both public and private industry **are still reticent to use reusable items**. The City has a local plastic bag ban and would like to add Styrofoam to the ban. A statewide ban would help for the plastic bags.
- Kit Sang Boos, Northampton: the biggest barrier is that **Plastic packaging is CHEAP**.
- Brooke Nash, MassDEP: We cannot solely recycle or compost our way out which was also stressed today in the presentations. We need to look upstream and make changes. Massachusetts residents should be assured that the items they do put into the recycling bin are getting recycled.
- Maryam Kamangar, Goodwill Berkshires - shared that her daughter just finished a report on restaurants using Bio plastics and they are not breaking down in compost facilities. Unintended consequences with mandatory composting . The best answer is that each municipality/region needs a facility for all these items to be collected separately.
- Miriam Gordon, Upstream- shared that the bio plastics cups have not decomposed even at industrial composting sites on West Coast.
- Sarah Nichols shared blog posts on compostables: <https://www.nrcm.org/blog/5-reasons-not-crazy-about-compostable-food-ware/>
- Renna Pye from Northampton: a group of HS leaders are working with the Mayor – and their finding is that most are not comfortable with reusable or fees for single use items.
- Northampton policy shared in the chat- <https://www.northamptonma.gov/AgendaCenter/ViewFile/Item/15164?fileID=137726>
- Brooke Nash, MassDEP: reported about her meeting with [www.usefull.us/](http://www.usefull.us/) who works with restaurants and cafes providing clean stainless steel reusable cups and containers. Patrons take them to go and deposit them in bins at participating outlets. Usefull picks them up and they get washed and returned to the participating restaurants and cafes, who report that the program is cost neutral. Derek Neilson of Usefull says they are launching this January in the Boston area.
- Janet Domenitz, [masspirg.org](http://masspirg.org) shared that with COVID-19- BOH regulations- your own cups are not able to brought into cafes and what about grocery stores?
- Brooke shared that some towns are supportive of people bringing reusable take out (example Plymouth’s Board of Health)
- Emily Hwang, Somerville: Single use is equated with safety. Why is single use safer than using my own containers?
- Ken Stone, Plymouth: Plymouth is looking to ban all single use plastic packaging, the Mayor is the lead. He asked about rigid polystyrene bans. Town of Brookline’s ordinance covers.

## What Can MassDEP do?

- Miriam Gordon, UPSTREAM: need to update state health code like the CA Safe to fill law. AB619 CA Safe to fill- Personal cups ok. UPSTREAM has many resources to help with changing laws. Also visit [Home | ReThink Disposable](#)
- Peg Hall, Greenfield: product stewardship bag bans are working just do not focus on the film size. Martins Farm in Greenfield- lost its organic certification due to accepting school compostable service ware.
- Create case studies of local initiatives to support reusables
- Start dialogue with Mass Dept of Public Health

**Facilitator:** Julia Greene, Northeast District 3 Municipal Assistance Coordinator, MassDEP

**Note Taker:** Kari Parcell, Southeast District 1 Municipal Assistance Coordinator, MassDEP

#### Question 1: Barriers to bans

- Claire Galkowski, SSRC. – MA towns (not cities) are not allowed to add fees to alternatives to plastic bags such as paper bags, etc.
- Kirstie Pecci, CLF- Fees as an alternative to bans can be an important incentive for people to bring reusable when able
- Susan Cascino, City of Boston- they worked with the Girl Scouts on a grassroots campaign to solicit the City Council and the Mayor's Office. Gaining their attention was key to passing plastic bag bans. It is about visible presence
- Sierra Rothberg, Lusterity- she worked with Susan (above) with the Girl Scouts on focusing on the ecosystem and animals affected by plastic and plastic waste and took to working on this grassroots campaign for 3-years! During that time, they produced documents and videos of their efforts
- Julia Greene, MassDEP- Lynn followed suit to Boston's ban and the Beach Sisters worked for a year in getting the ban passed
- Sierra Rothberg, Lusterity- this has led to an evolution of other materials to focus bans on- Styrofoam, straws, etc. The Girl Scouts and the troop moms started to make Boomerang Bags to provide to low income people so that the argument that low income people would be negatively affected by the ban
- Susan Waite, Northhampton- the elephant in the room is the economic impact on businesses. COVID- is making things worse for businesses who are barely hanging on. Even before COVID, Northhampton was having trouble selling the town on a plastic bag ban
- Kelley Dennings, Center for Biological Diversity- public health is a huge issue when it comes to reuse
- Cate Barr, Arlington -Arlington does not allow for the reuse of bags or even to bring in reused paper bags, but the food bank/pantry can take them. There is a pile of paper bags by the senior population that won't reuse anything due to a fear of germs etc. She believes that education is necessary around COVID/health and reuse
- Kelley Dennings, Center for Biological Diversity- public health (department) is producing fear and a reaction!

#### Question 2: Education or innovation?

- Sydney Harris, PSI- reusables and COVID go beyond MA, there is an "ICK" factor when it comes to reuse. We have heard that it is safe, but people are unsure. One way to overcome is 3<sup>rd</sup> party reuse. Meaning reusables are provided and then returned to be commercially sanitized and washed- states like CA and NYC have introduced this. It is an effort to change the "ICK" perception, just like when a restaurant washes our dishware and utensils when we are done dining there
- Louise Amyot, Greening Greenfield- Greenfield passed the bag ban, and they partnered with a cloth store to make reusable bags and pass them out to people. They also created a pattern and gave them to the senior center where they make the bags there
- Sierra Rothberg, Lusterity- Boston Bags help to reduce textile waste and they borrowed the needed equipment to make reusable bags- they held workshops at high schools, and partnered with Plastic Oceans and made about 1,500 bags

- Susan Waite, Northampton, WASHING your bags is so important! People bring some nasty bags into the store. Education on washing them is needed! It also adds to the fear of dirty reusable items in stores
- Cate Barr, Arlington- question for Sydney, can regular takeout containers be washed by the 3<sup>rd</sup> party reuse? Sydney -The answer is no, because the plastic would melt under the heat of the wash. The containers being washed and reuse are metal and glass. Mostly metal, since glass is more fragile.
- Cate Barr, Arlington- are their points of wisdom of a world before plastics?

### Question 3: Role of DEP?

- Claire Galkowski, SSRC. – there needs to be more open communication with DEP and the state health department. They operate in their own silos when it would be beneficial to share goals and outcomes
- Kirstie Pecci, CLF – Claire is 100% correct. We don't have good info. on what is not recyclable at our MRF's and good usable/shareable data

## 2. Solutions for your business or institution

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**Facilitator:** Kathi Mirza, Southeast District 2 Municipal Assistance Coordinator, MassDEP

**Note Taker:** Will Mbah, Environmental Analyst, Municipal Waste Reduction Program, MassDEP

- Introduction by facilitator, Kathi Mirza, who started with a stimulating conversation for folks to briefly talk about their business/challenges.
- **Gihan Hewage, RTS** (Waste Hauler) - Helping clients at institutions be more sustainable by using more reusable utensils in dorms since cafeterias are now closed.
- **Cheryl Schnitzer, Stonehill College** - Had a pilot of green to go containers for students in school cafeterias. The program was very successful, though it was challenging to get the students to bring the containers back. It requires participation from everyone in the schools to be effective.
- **Chris Freeman, Grainmaker**- Founder of a restaurant that offers reusable packaging and provides a 5% discount to customers if they bring back the container. They took a hit with COVID-19.
- **Alison Rogers, Usefull** – Usefull is offering free rental for reusable containers to corporate campuses.
- **Scott Richardson, Longwood Software** - Scalable commercial washing facilities. The need for grant support from DEP.
- **Ashley Muspratt, Center for EcoTechnology (CET)** - Operates the RecyclingWorks in Massachusetts program under contract to MassDEP. Through this program they provide free technical assistance on waste reduction, reuse, recycling and composting for businesses and institutions in the State. They are a resource to restaurants and other businesses.
- Important one-line from participants: we can't recycle the planet
- Claudine Ellyin, MassDEP Branch Chief Commercial Branch, in attendance to listen to the issues/challenges facing businesses.
- **Jenny Isler, Clark University** - They have all available programs in place. The challenge is how to convince and engage the students.
- Participants emphasized the need for more resources, especially grants and guidance from DEP.

### 3. Solutions for your elementary or secondary school

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**Facilitator:** Ann McGovern, Environmental Analyst, Municipal Waste Reduction Program, MassDEP

**Note Taker:** Cathy Doodnauth, Environmental Analyst, Municipal Waste Reduction Program, MassDEP

- Ann McGovern began the discussion with the question: “what are some challenges faced at schools or within school districts to reduce single-use packaging?”
- Kevin Dawson from the Department of Education discussed the current challenges in reducing single-use packaging during the pandemic
  - Potable water must be included as a part of lunch meals for students. With students learning remotely, lunch still has to be sent to homes. This makes it difficult to meet that requirement specifically on the Cape, as there’s a ban on plastic water bottles. Schools are unsure of how to meet that requirement.
  - Heather Billings from CET responded that this is definitely an unintended consequence of the plastic water bottle ban. During the pandemic, she’s seen schools using small plastic cups or “dixie” cups, neither of which are likely to be recycled because of the materials. She believes it would be better to use plastic water bottles as that material is more recyclable than the plastic cups that are now the alternatives.
  - Kevin added that schools have also closed off water bubblers, making it difficult for students doing part-remote, part in-school learning. Schools are also temporarily banning reusable water bottles (usually a town-by-town decision). There’s no choice but to use single-use packaging.
  - Heather added that schools must regroup from this and hopes that Miriam’s resources includes information on the safety of reusables; hopefully this research can help relax restrictions against reusable bottles and refill stations.
- Heather Billings (CET) also raised the issue of school trays. Many schools use boxed lunches or disposable trays rather than reusable lunch trays. Schools need to get dishwashers.
- Laura Alves (City of Boston/Boston Public Schools) reports that Boston got a corporate partner to purchase reusable cups and donate them. She reported little to no pushback to reusables, and kids were able to use their own reusable cups in school. Students were recently pulled out of schools but before that, the schools purchased water coolers that had less contamination because the water flowed from the top, not the bottom via a push button.
- About reusable lunch trays, Laura made the point that schools do not currently have the capacity or the means to accommodate dishwashing but hopes that sustainability is a factor when retrofitting schools in the future.
- Ann McGovern said that DEP supports dishwashing machines and reusable trays at schools, and that the planning process for new schools or school upgrades are a good time to think about making space for dishwashers and recycling bins.
- Robin Ingenthron of Good Point Recycling told the group about his business that ships out thousands of packages a month of replacement parts for electronics. They are starting a new program to utilize used bubble mailers and bubble wrap envelopes to wrap the small replacement parts in, in place of packing peanuts or bubble wrap.
- Their current issue is the personal information on labels on used bubble mailers – they do not want to include this personal info when sending parts to a customer and thinks schools and students can help. The business can have the students redact personal information on mailers from the school as a project, and then the business will purchase those mailers from the school.

- Betsy Harris from Weymouth Public Schools asked Robin a few questions and was interested in working together to have the kids get some experience in-house while helping Robin's business with mailer supplies.
- Ann McGovern asked that Robin send her a follow-up email so she can help pursue this project with schools as pilot programs. All agreed this could be a great opportunity to assist students with in-house experience, promote reuse, and help Robin, while being able to measure their effort by reusing single-use mailers.
- Betsy Harris from Weymouth Public Schools discussed overburdened custodians that are facing numerous challenges due to the pandemic already, so it's hard to ask them to increase their workload with improving recycling and finding reusable alternatives over single-use products.
- She asked if any other districts have found a solution. She believes that having resources to show recycling works and makes a difference (recyclable materials being made into new products, like sneakers into asphalt, jeans into insulation, etc.). A list can help encourage people to recycle.
- Nathan Gray with EcoBrick US discussed the EcoBrick organization (turning plastic water bottles into stackable bricks to build furniture) and how they work with students. He recently started working with Salem High School to start a program to collect soft, non-recyclable plastic film/wrap to build EcoBricks and create projects within the school. The program is a great way to educate and show a simple yet effective solution to take on single-use plastics.
  - EcoBricks are empty plastic water bottles that are packed tightly with soft, dry, non-recyclable plastics like plastic film, bags, etc. The project in Salem is to build a shed out of them. They need 12,000 EcoBricks and the interior of the shed will show the plastic bottle bottoms packed with plastic. EcoBricks can build furniture, art projects, garden projects, etc.
  - Heather Billings asked if that's something students create at the school, or if the bricks are shipped to them.
  - Nathan explained that the projects are mostly local to cut the carbon footprint. Salem High School will be collecting the items, using them, and keeping them there. They have done similar projects around Massachusetts.
  - He described the process: kids take the flexible plastic and cut it up, then stuff inside of a bottle by hand. One packed water bottle is considered a brick. They then use 100% silicone adhesive to bind the bricks together and make wall panels, furniture, etc. Useful for schools to make desks, tables, etc., instead of buying new.

## Next Meeting

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**Date:** Wednesday, December 16, 2020

**Time:** 10AM - 12 PM

**Location:** Virtual

Register at: <https://zoom.us/meeting/register/tJUtfuCppj4pHtEGiLPbm8W4lamHEcl2FvB7>

**Topic:** Priority Materials Deep Dive

- Used/Surplus Furniture (Commercial/Institutional)
- Electronics
- Textiles & Clothing
- Building Materials
- Transportation & Distribution Packaging

## Upcoming Events & Announcements

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### *Reduce, Reuse, Recycle-Palooza!*

In honor of the 23rd anniversary of America Recycles Day on November 15 (and a do-over for Earth Day), the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) has compiled a month of informative programming we're calling *Reduce, Reuse, Recycle-palooza!* Because why celebrate just one day in November, when you can celebrate for the entire month?

See: [full event lineup and registration information](#) .

## Reduce & Reuse Working Group Networking Resources:

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Reduce & Reuse Working Group participants are encouraged to connect with other members in-between meetings to collaborate, share resources, ideas, best practices, fact sheets and more.

### [R&R Working Group Directory](#)

- Interested in joining the R&R workgroup? Sign up [here](#).
- Need to update your contact information? Email: [erin.victor@mass.gov](mailto:erin.victor@mass.gov)

### **Massachusetts Reduce & Reuse Network Listserv** (Google Group)

- Join by emailing: [ReduceReuseNetwork-MA+subscribe@googlegroups.com](mailto:ReduceReuseNetwork-MA+subscribe@googlegroups.com)
- Email the listserv: [ReduceReuseNetwork-MA@googlegroups.com](mailto:ReduceReuseNetwork-MA@googlegroups.com)

## Contact

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To learn more about the R&R Working Group, visit: <https://www.mass.gov/service-details/massdep-reduce-reuse-rr-working-group>

For questions, contact:

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