

**Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP)**  
**Recycling Market Development (RMD) Workgroup**  
**June 13, 2023 - 1:00 pm**  
**Meeting Summary**

*The meeting included a presentation on the Draft Recycling Market Development Action Plan.*

Question: To what extent will a key metric for screening be the potential for GHG emission reductions? Some businesses may be more, or less focused on that aspect.

Answer: Embodied carbon and life-cycle analysis is certainly on MassDEP's radar and something we will factor into decisions moving forward. We're calling this a Recycling Market Development Plan, but we're using "recycling" in a broad categorical sense - inclusive of reuse, composting, anaerobic digestion, repair, etc. When you look at it that way, reuse may rise to the top for multiple reasons. The RMD Plan will connect with the Reduce & Reuse Plan and some of the best opportunities will involve reuse of material. The other priority will be driving market development in-state. Not every market is going to be in-state, but, where we can, we want to realize economic development and job creation benefits in Massachusetts.

Comment: The opportunity to test new recycled products for market fit - for example through partnerships with analytics labs such as UMass Lowell - will be very valuable to startups doing new recycling tech.

Response: MassDEP is trying to build a broader network around RMD. We may know of some organizations working on it, but if our meeting participants are aware of other relevant organizations, we'd love to get feedback from them on the Plan as well.

Comment: The various business accelerators and incubators in the state may be good partners: Clean Tech Open, Mass Challenge, GreenTown Labs. Clean Tech Open has some interesting recycling companies this season. No idea which will turn into something, but MassDEP could offer some services once they move further along: grants, testing labs, etc. if they locate in the state and take materials from here.

Question: Is there an environmental consultant to help projects make sure they fit into MassDEP programs?

Answer: If a company is applying for a MassDEP permit, that's different and they should hire an independent consultant. As far as grant applications, we've discussed that internally and identified some resources for assistance. We've also discussed staging informational webinars to provide guidance prior to the application period as we've seen a wide variation in the quality of applications we've received. Some applications contain good ideas but aren't presented effectively. There may be some areas where we can provide more guidance and clarity on the information we are seeking in applications.

Comment: One of the things MassDEP is looking to do is connect to programs that aren't recycling programs per se but offer resources that could be helpful to recycling businesses. These programs are typically open to all Massachusetts businesses. We're looking to improve our own knowledge and literacy of these programs so we can act as a conduit to ensure recycling businesses are aware of existing resources.

Question: What funds or grants are available today or this summer in the MassDEP realm for recycling startups? Or should startups wait for the Innovation Grant to be announced?

Answer: We expect the next Recycling and Reuse Business Development Grant application to be issued in the fall and will share information about that soon. The grant will be for capital expenses for new or existing recycling businesses - generally someone who can move forward with a project within a year of submitting an application. Projects in the R&D realm would be supported through the Innovation Grant.

Comment: MassDEP also offers Reduce-Reuse-Repair Microgrants up to \$5,000. Link: <https://www.mass.gov/how-to/apply-for-a-massdep-reduce-reuse-repair-micro-grant>. These are explicitly for reuse and repair (not recycling). The application is open on an ongoing basis. We've recently engaged in internal discussions about a new version with the potential for larger grant amounts.

Question: In addition to developing markets, is there an opportunity to protect existing markets for recycling? There has been a lot of negative press and it seems like some are trying to tear down recycling. It would be terrific if MassDEP promotes the existing infrastructure and gets out in front of those messages. The people in this meeting know curbside material gets recycled, but due to the messaging, the public may not believe it. And a recycling company defending recycling may not seem genuine to them.

Response: MassDEP has been sharing messages through the Recycle Smart program: social media posts, a newsletter, the "where does my recycling go" page and other resources. We also recently requested data from MRFs to provide more detail about what is collected, recycled and how it is managed to have more transparency so we can share that publicly as well.

Recent newsletter topics have included "the truth about plastic recycling," and "all about plastic." The newsletter has 11,000 subscribers and Recycle Smart has 30,000 followers across social media. MassDEP's name can add credibility: perhaps posting information directly to the website, showing data from MRFs that confirms plastic is not going overseas and is indeed recycled domestically, or profiling recyclers in the region.

We've worked for years trying to get people to put the right things in their recycling bin. When they hear "it's all going in the trash," they may be less inclined to care about what goes in the bin. I'm sure many people on this call have had conversations with neighbors, etc. about whether or not material gets recycled. We can thank two local newscasts for doing segments from local MRFs. One idea would be inviting reporters to go on a MRF tour to show that recycling is really happening.

Question: Any chance MRF visits could be organized? It would be great for folks to visit Casella's facility in Boston, for example, to learn about the supply chain and make connections.

Answer: That's up to the MRFs, logistically. MassDEP recently had the opportunity to visit the retrofitted Casella MRF. It is helpful to see recycling happen. Maybe there are ways to share this via video, etc.

Comment: The Vinyl Institute has grant funding available for growing post-consumer recycling of vinyl. The next deadline for funding is July 17. You can learn more here: <https://www.vinylinfo.org/recycling/>