

School Recycling in Massachusetts 11/18/2020

Presenters: Ann McGovern, MassDEP; Heather Billings, CET; Meryl Brott, City of Cambridge Recycling Program Manager; Micaela Guglielmi, City of Salem Waste Reduction Coordinator

Agenda:

- **Introduction, Ann McGovern**
- **City of Salem, Ann McGovern on behalf of Micaela Guglielmi**
- **RecyclingWorks MA & GreenTeam, Heather Billings**
- **City of Cambridge, Meryl Brott**
- **Questions & Discussion**

Introduction:

Ann McGovern of MassDEP welcomed attendees to the webinar on how to initiate or expand recycling and/or composting and food waste diversion programs in schools. She introduced the three presenters – Heather Billings from the Center for EcoTechnology (CET); Meryl Brott, Recycling Program Manager for Cambridge; and Micaela Guglielmi, Waste Reduction Coordinator from Salem who could not make it, but Ann will cover her points.

Ann provided information on free resources that are available from MassDEP to help municipalities implement school recycling and waste diversion programs.

First, there are the different grants that MassDEP offers and Ann encouraged participants to view the webpage [here](#). A key program is the [Sustainable Materials Recovery Program \(SMRP\)](#) grants, which includes:

- the School Recycling Assistance grant to help initiate or expand a school recycling program,
- the Technical Assistance grant, to receive help from [Municipal Assistance Coordinators \(MACs\)](#),
- the Recycling Dividends Program (RDP), to receive funding to enhance recycling programs, and
- the Small Scale Initiatives grant, to receive funding to enhance recycling programs,

To qualify for any SMRP grant, there is a **new eligibility requirement for the 2021 grant period**.

Municipalities interested in applying for a grant must certify that paper, cardboard, bottle and can recycling is available in all municipality buildings, including schools, or will be within 30 days of the award notification. Previously, DEP has required municipalities to certify that all municipal buildings except for schools have recycling available, but it's time to bring schools into the requirement.

The [Massachusetts Waste Disposal Bans](#) are state regulations that ban certain materials from disposal or transfer to disposal, including paper, cardboard, paperboard, plastic containers, glass, and metal containers. These are key materials that are likely to be found in school waste streams and must be diverted from disposal to comply with MA law and regulations that govern waste disposal.

Ann moved on to discuss the School Recycling Assistance grants, which began in 2013. DEP has awarded 26 school districts over the last seven years of running this program. All awarded districts have seen successful recycling programs. Four districts have utilized the grant to purchase dishwashing machines for the school cafeteria, in efforts to switch from disposable trays to reusable trays. Ann emphasized that this is a great way to manage waste in cafeterias. If schools can refurbish or install dishwashing

machines, they will be reducing waste immensely, and can even help create jobs by spending the budget for disposables on staff to manage the reusables.

Another resource is [THE GREEN TEAM](#), a free program for Massachusetts schools to implement recycling and composting, and promote education and leadership within the school community.

THE GREEN TEAM offers free resources on the website, including educational materials and activities that are available to download and that are aligned with statewide curriculum frameworks. The program also offers free recycling and composting equipment for teachers and schools. The website will soon feature an entire section on signage that will include signs for recycling, composting, and share table instructions (all signage is customizable). There are webinars and videos, and a recognition and prize program to award winning schools (virtual this year and will continue to be offered in this format).

Ann let attendees know that there were helpful handouts to download during the webinar, including a recycling report from 2013 grant recipient Chicopee, plus handouts from Salem's program. Handouts will be sent to registered participants along with a link to the recording sometime after the webinar.

If you have any questions related to the School Recycling Assistance grant or THE GREEN TEAM, feel free to email Ann McGovern at Ann.McGovern@mass.gov

City of Salem:

Ann summarized Salem's program after receiving the School Recycling Assistance grant in FY2018.

Salem was awarded \$30,000, the maximum amount for this grant. Funding can be used for implementation and/or equipment costs. Salem planned to use \$5,000 for implementation (which can include stipends or salary for a program manager) and the remaining \$25,000 for equipment.

They began by doing inventory of equipment the district had, and purchased what was missing, including: blue bins for classrooms, carts for curbside pickup, dollies and barrels to pick up recycling and trash simultaneously, tilt trucks for easier collection of cardboard, and printed flyers and signage.

Salem faced challenges while implementing the school recycling grant. The grant coordinator and school recycling coordinator retired halfway through the 3-year grant duration, leaving a gap in leadership. Current recycling coordinator Micaela Guglielmi took over, coordinating with school facilities and custodial staff to see what they needed and how best to utilize the funds. Currently, the COVID-19 pandemic poses another challenge and interrupted the grant's final year, but Micaela pushed through and purchased equipment that will improve the school recycling program, wrapping up the grant successfully.

The success of the program is in part due to the top down support for the recycling program. This includes the support of the district superintendent, school principals, and teachers. Additionally, a collaboration between the Salem Engineering Department and school facilities department was vital. Ann encourages all municipalities to partner and collaborate between recycling and school departments as much as possible. Salem saw increased student involvement, and a 6% increase in recycling/decrease in trash generation for 2018-2019.

Any questions about the Salem school recycling program and experience should be directed to Micaela Guglielmi at mguglielmi@salem.com.

Ann discussed a vital part of the School Recycling Assistance grant: the implementation of a school recycling policy if one is not already in place. She emphasized that whether the grant is awarded or not, this policy should be implemented to start the process of starting recycling programs at schools.

There's a [school recycling policy template](#) from MassDEP available as a handout, along with Salem's communication samples, equipment inventory, images of purchased equipment, and a summary of their implementation plan. Municipalities can create a school recycling implementation plan as a roadmap for school districts to follow. This can help identify what equipment is needed for each school, what the needs of the custodial staff are, and can help track recycling and waste reduction.

Ann wrapped up the Salem presentation and introduced Heather Billings from CET.

Center for EcoTechnology: RecyclingWorks MA & THE GREEN TEAM

Heather Billings introduced herself and explained that CET is under contract with MassDEP to provide RecyclingWorks MA assistance and help manage THE GREEN TEAM programs. Both programs complement each other to assist with school recycling efforts and help create implementation plans.

[RecyclingWorks MA](#) provides free assistance for businesses and institutions, along with technical assistance to reduce, donate, and divert recycling and food waste to be in compliance with MA Waste Disposal Bans. [THE GREEN TEAM](#) helps schools incorporate recycling activities and education into lessons, and has materials ready to download under the site's Library & Curricula tab.

Through THE GREEN TEAM, schools can request recycling equipment (bins, compost bins, carts, etc.) for free. There is also a monthly newsletter to subscribe to, plus stories and webinars. This spring, they sent out weekly e-blasts with ideas of educational environmental resources for kids to do at home and assist teachers with engaging students in e-learning. Past e-blasts are available on the site.

Heather highlighted the importance of why schools should be recycling – not only as an eligibility requirement for grants, but because keeping recyclables out of the waste stream is a lesson students carry with them into the future, and we have the opportunity to make it easy, routine, cost-effective, and successful.

There are steps to setting up a recycling program, clearly outlined on Heather's slides (which will be included in a post-webinar email). The responsibilities of recycling should not fall on the shoulders of one person or group but should come from the top by creating a district-wide recycling policy to create a culture of how things are done. Begin by: building support; identifying decision makers, what materials need to be collected, and where they are generated from; who will move them, how they will move them, what equipment is needed for that; whether the equipment aligns with the hauler's capabilities; and emphasize training for both users and movers.

Heather advises to start planning around typical areas that cardboard, paper, bottles, and cans are generated in. These are all part of the MA Waste Disposal Bans and cannot be disposed of with the trash. This includes classrooms, cafeterias, etc.

Identify who will be moving the materials – it will likely be a combination of volunteers, teachers, custodians, and more. Some of the responsibility may belong to students if there is a recycling program but talking to staff will help identify who will be moving the materials and see what will help them.

Schools will need to plan for container types and dumpster locations.. Ensuring a flow of materials and compatible equipment is important – for example, are there stairs or a ramp from inside to outside? Will pick-up be in the parking lot or loading zone? older schools didn't plan for extra containers for single-stream or dual-stream recycling, so there may be space constraints to consider.

Heather recommends paired bins for indoor collection to keep streams separated and advises to think about how the equipment works together. Carts are easily moved inside the school but can be heavy and awkward to lift into dumpster. And it's important to know what kind of service the hauler provides.

Heather emphasized that custodians are the school's recycling champions. They are usually understaffed and face budget reductions but are vital to school recycling programs. Starting or expanding recycling programs can be perceived as adding work, but it shouldn't be – the same volume of material is generated but it's just separated into a different stream. Be sure to talk to custodians to see how they currently move waste and ask for their input!

Learn how best to consolidate materials in your schools. See how the streams are collected, and work to keep them separate. This can help confirm that separated materials are going to be recycled.

Managing cardboard is vital, especially at the beginning of the school year with purchasing new supplies. Having a baler, compactor, or flatbed, tilt cart, or hamper, can help hold more boxes when flattened.

Collection in the kitchen can sometimes involve a subcontractor. Food waste will always be generated but should be handled separately in some cases because of either the school initiatives, for state regulations, or for cost-management. Be thoughtful about where the waste is generated and how much is generated to know where to place bins. When adding bins for collecting recycling and/or food waste, the number or size of trash bins can likely be reduced. Shared responsibility for removal of materials (i.e., custodians move cardboard, kitchen moves food scraps, etc.) can create an efficient program.

Setting up cafeteria waste stations depends on the layout of the room. Take into consideration what the students have in their hands to set up the sorting order – a pour-out station can be beneficial, plus additional collection bins for recycling and food waste. [Share tables](#) should follow USDA guidelines to repurpose uneaten or unused food.

Changes to the MA Waste Disposal Bans include a proposed organics ban reduction from 1 ton of material disposed per week to ½ ton. Some larger schools will have to set up a diversion program to meet this requirement and can use the [Food Estimation Guide](#) to do the math and begin drawing up ideas for composting/food scrap programs.

Heather recommends using signage to reduce contamination and reminds attendees that examples are available for free online via THE GREEN TEAM and RecyclingWorks MA. These programs work with MassDEP's [Recycle Smart MA](#) initiative for signs and educational materials that standardize what is acceptable or not at a recycling facility.

When implementing a school recycling program, municipalities should consider funding. There are costs for recycling and composting but there are potential offsetting savings from avoided trash hauls. Additional funds can come from SMRP Grants or RDP funds.

Heather asks that those starting programs track their results and share them to keep improving their programs and to share their story. Any questions can be directed to THE GREEN TEAM at

recycle@thegreenteam.org, RecyclingWorks MA at info@recyclingworksma.com, or directly to Heather Billings at Heather.Billings@CETonline.org.

Ann thanked Heather for the great information and reminded attendees that questions will be answered at the end. She then introduced Meryl Brott, Recycling Program Manager for Cambridge.

City of Cambridge:

Meryl Brott has been working on the Cambridge school recycling and composting programs since 2009. The schools have had recycling since the mid-1990's. The DPW works with all schools in the district, and has a few lessons learned to share.

Meryl emphasized the importance of having custodian and top down support. DPW had a meeting with custodians and chief operating officer to discuss the importance of recycling and composting. They present annually to custodians and school staff before the school year begins and visit the schools to build relationships and provide materials.

In the past, a memo from DPW and the CPS facilities director would be sent to Senior Custodians detailing the procedures for recycling and disposing of other materials such as scrap metal and fluorescent bulbs. It has been invaluable to have custodians, principals, staff, DPW staff, and school committees on the same page on expectations of recycling. Up until recently, DPW was receiving weekly recycling reports from custodians to see – and be able to share – the impact of the recycling program. Involving them in this way helps gain their commitment to the program.

The city works with principals to forward on DPW emails containing important information on recycling. In addition to offering presentations and providing materials, quizzes and sorting games to teachers, they also work closely with staff in food services, clerks, family liaisons, and librarians.

Cafeteria lunch aides assist with the food composting program and share tables program. DPW gets information to teachers and organizes volunteers at the beginning of the school year to ensure these programs run smoothly. Bringing composting to the schools was a heavy lift but has been successful. Key components included a fun logo, presenting to teachers before the program began, and launching the program with posters, fact sheets and school assemblies. The document featuring 5 easy steps to starting lunchroom composting helped make the new endeavor, when presented to principals, seem manageable.

Meryl stressed that it can take time for the program to really get going – their program started in 2009 but took several years to get off its feet, and finally got all schools on board by 2016.

If you have any questions about Cambridge's school recycling programs, please contact Meryl Brott at mbrott@cambridgema.gov. Ann thanked Meryl for her presentation and moved on to take questions from attendees.

Questions:

Q: We are running into issues at our local elementary school – we have no room for another dumpster! How can we handle this issue?

A: Heather recommends looking into carts; perhaps the carts can be staged in a hallway or loading dock and moved out for pickup when needed. Ann says to be creative in figuring out how to utilize your space.

Q: We've required schools to have recycling programs for years. What kind of documentation will be required to certify this for the new SMRP grant requirement?

A: Ann answers that there is a certification process in place that grant applicants sign when recycling is available in all municipal buildings on the Overview and Certification of Minimum Eligibility Criteria form. This section will include schools for the upcoming grant year, and municipalities will certify this by checking the box.

Q: Our town is part of a five-town regional school district and we have one of the schools in town. Is it the district or town that has to certify recycling is available in schools?

A: Ann answers that it is where the school is located – if there is a school in your town and your town is applying for a grant, you will need to certify that the school located in your town has recycling available. If you're having trouble getting the school or district to implement the program, contact MassDEP for assistance.

Q: Also, how do I find out if the district has a school recycling policy – is that on file with the state?

A: The state does not have school recycling policies on file for school districts, please follow-up with district via the superintendent or director. Ann suggests using the policy template available from MassDEP, as it's simple, straightforward, and can be modified as appropriate, making it easy for the district to accept.

Q. Can just the Schools in a district apply?

A. The SMRP grant must be submitted by the municipal official on record with MassDEP's online grant application system, ReTrac. Schools should coordinate with the municipal recycling coordinator (or DPW or Health Dept.) for their municipality to ask them to apply for the school recycling assistance grant section of the SMRP grant application, and can provide the information requested on the grant application. If awarded, the schools may implement the grant, in coordination with the municipal applicant.

Q: Do you have any suggestions for collecting recyclables and compostables from school events, like sports, theater, or big meetings?

A: Ann answers that Salem purchased public space dual recycling and trash containers that can go outside the auditorium, gyms, or outdoors so that visitors can access both recycling and trash. It depends on how the material is collected, and it can be as easy as adding a recycling cart next to the trash to be collected. Heather advises to see if there is a different group of staff that works outside the building – talk to them first but try starting with a bin that will work outdoors that has a cover or rain protector to stay dry. Also, having easily readable signage can stop people from "wishcycling".

Q: Who is the best contact for a school walkthrough or for a presentation to environmental club leaders? Can parents join THE GREEN TEAM, or must it be a teacher?

A: First, have your school join THE GREEN TEAM, www.thegreenteam.org. When you register, you can ask for specific assistance and this will be referred to Heather, who will assist you. Walkthroughs are usually through the SMRP School Recycling Assistance grant, so that would be evaluated on a case-by-case basis by DEP. Parents and high school students can sign up for THE GREEN TEAM, too – it does not

have to be teachers only. School districts that have received a school recycling assistance grant from MassDEP in the past are not eligible for additional school recycling assistance grants.

Q. What is the link to the methodology for determining the number of students at each school that would likely generate 1/2 ton per week?

A: [Food Waste Estimation Guide - RecyclingWorks Massachusetts](#)

Q. You just mentioned our state policy of carry in /carry out at our state parks and beaches. Where can I find that policy?

A: This is a practice used at many state parks and beaches for years. These rules are typically posted on signage at the parks. (Trash cans are still provided at some of the most heavily used parks during the summer.)

Q. Our school does recycling, but we can do more. I am Environmental Club Advisor. Where do you think the best place to start? GreenTeam?

A. Yes, join THE GREEN TEAM, www.thegreenteam.org, and request assistance to improve your recycling program. We will try to assist you as best we can, and might be able to steer you to resources to further help your program.

Q. Do you have guidance or research data for school cafe workers and custodians that use dishwashers and durables on how to handle waste materials safety in the era of COVID-19 and steps they can take to reduce risks?

A. Check with the MA Dept of Elementary and Secondary Education for updates, [Coronavirus/COVID-19: School Meals Information and Resources \(mass.edu\)](#)

Conclusion:

Ann wrapped up the webinar with some advice: reach out to schools in the district, to the superintendent, and start a conversation about recycling programs. Even a parent on the PTA can be the best advocate to get the ball rolling, but it is a group collective effort that will implement a recycling program successfully. A lot of times, the students want to be able to recycle so don't forget you will have support from the school community. And please reach out for assistance from THE GREEN TEAM!

For schools that may fall into the Organics Waste Disposal Ban threshold, RecyclingWorks MA will be able to provide help to those schools. Ann recommends checking out the [food estimator tool](#) on the RecyclingWorks MA website to see whether your school falls above that threshold. If you do, don't worry – technical assistance will be provided to help reduce your food waste.

Ann thanked the presenters and attendees for joining the webinar and ended the meeting.