



## **The State of Recycling in Colorado (2006)**

In a state renowned for its natural beauty with a tourism industry that thrives upon visitors enjoying the great outdoors, natural resource management should be a top priority, but Colorado lags far behind the rest of the country when it comes to recycling and effective resource management. Colorado's recycling rate is a dismal 12.5%, less than half the national average. Among U.S. states, Colorado ranks 39th in recycling. This means we landfill nearly 7 million tons of valuable resources every year. With a growing population and increasing environmental awareness among residents, now is a critical time for Colorado to embrace recycling for its economic opportunities and its environmental benefits.

- Colorado only monitors landfill activities—there is no state data on total waste generated.
- There are four state agencies involved in solid waste management—none of them provides on-going technical assistance or resources to support overall waste reduction activities. This means the communities who support recycling and waste reduction have no support at the state level, in stark contrast to the rest of the country.
- Colorado residents produce much more trash than the national average—the average Colorado resident generates more than 9 pounds of trash per day. The national average is about 7 pounds of trash per person per day.
- Colorado has 72 landfills for municipal solid waste. Some of the most highly contaminated and hazardous sites in the United States are former landfills here in Colorado—Marshall Landfill in Boulder County and Lowry Landfill in Denver. Marshall Landfill has cost Boulder taxpayers more than \$7 million in clean-up costs since its closing in 1992, and the city is now liable in perpetuity for maintaining an impermeable cover over the 160 acre site. Cleanup at Lowry Landfill has continued for more than 20 years, with at least another 30 years of extensive monitoring and maintenance expected at the site. Cleanup costs are estimated to total more than \$134 million, not including unknown amounts spent prior to 1994.
- The North American Industrial Classification System reported that in 2002 there were over 3,500 Colorado jobs (and \$159 million dollars in wages) created by the solid waste industry, which includes collection, landfill and materials recovery.

## **Colorado Communities and Organizations Making a Difference**

Despite the low statewide recycling rate, several communities are making impressive strides in increasing recycling for its environmental and economic benefits:

- Several communities in Colorado are looking beyond recycling to Zero Waste policies. Resolutions supporting Zero Waste have been adopted in the city of Boulder, Boulder County, and Summit County.
- The city of Loveland's municipal garbage utility's costs to recycle are almost \$40 per ton less than the cost to landfill. Loveland has been held up as a model recycling community for the entire country with a recycling rate near 55 percent.
- Mayor Hickenlooper recently rejuvenated Denver's recycling program by expanding services and reducing sorting by residents.
- Lafayette City Council recently voted to pursue a municipal contract for recycling and trash service in order to expand curbside recycling to all neighborhoods and to cut collection costs for residents by nearly 50%.
- Boulder Community Hospital has set a new environmental standard within the health care industry by recycling traditional materials as well as electronics and textiles, composting food waste, and eliminating waste through smart buying practices. By replacing disposable blue wrap used for sterilization with durable, reusable containers, the Hospital avoided 22 tons of waste and saved \$111,000 in 2004.
- By becoming the state's first Zero Waste hotel, the Boulder Outlook Hotel & Suites saw sales increase by \$25,000 over three months. Becoming a zero-waste operation transferred business to Boulder Outlook from travelers who want to support an environmentally friendly establishment. "It's the best investment I could have made," said owner Dan King.
- Waste reduction activities accounted for 50% of the reduction in greenhouse gas emissions achieved by the city of Fort Collins.
- Colorado's "Greening Government" initiatives of 2005-06 follows the example of several local governments (Fort Collins, Boulder, Aspen, Broomfield, Loveland, and others) by emphasizing waste reduction in state operations.

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