THE STATE OF RECYCLING IN COLORADO

2nd edition

2018

2017 was just downright trashy in Colorado. Our beautiful state continues to be one of the most wasteful in the country. In 2018, we created a record 9,307,000 tons of waste while our recycling rate flat-lined at just 12%, which puts us far behind the national average of 35% recycling. On average, each Colorado resident throws away nearly eight pounds of trash per day, or more than 1.45 tons per year. That's more than eight million tons piling up in our landfills every year. Colorado is headed in the wrong direction—we're producing more trash each year and not improving our recycling rate.

But it doesn't have to be that way. Nearly 95% of Colorado's waste could be recycled or composted: we could recycle 32%, including bottles, cans and paper; 37% could be composted, like grass clippings, food waste and clean wood; and 26% could be reused or recycled through specialized programs for textiles, electronics, construction materials, and other bulky materials[i]. The next four years are crucial for putting Colorado on the path to creating a circular economy where 95% of the materials we throw away are transformed into new products or composted into nutrient-rich soil.

STATEWIDE DATA ON HOW MUCH OF COLORADO'S WASTE COULD BE RECOVERED

WHY INVEST IN RECYCLING NOW?

In 2016, Colorado set its first-ever statewide recycling goals; achieving our first 2021 target of 28% would more than double our current recycling rate, keep an additional 1,500,000 tons of waste out of the landfill every year, create jobs, bolster local economies and protect our environment. **One of the most immediate benefits would be reducing climate pollution: Increasing recycling statewide to 28% would reduce carbon emissions by over 2.2 million tons ($MTCO_2e$) every year, the equivalent of taking over 485,000 cars off the road annually.**

Recycling is a win for Colorado's economy as well. Each year Colorado throws away nearly $265 million worth of recyclable material such as aluminum, cardboard, paper, glass and plastics in our landfills. That material could have been recycled here in Colorado, creating local jobs and strengthening local economies. On average, recycling creates nine times more jobs per ton than landfills and reusing materials creates 30 times more jobs.

WHAT THE NEW GOVERNOR SHOULD DO TO PRIORITIZE RECYCLING IN THE FIRST 100 DAYS

#1: APPOINT A STATEWIDE RECYCLING COORDINATOR

The appointment of a statewide Recycling Coordinator in the Governor's office is one of the most prominent signals to investors, businesses and local communities that Colorado is serious about creating a circular economy. This person would coordinate with other state agencies and efforts, including the Office of Economic Development and International Trade (OEDIT), Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) and the state climate action plan, and would also interface directly with local governments to create a comprehensive approach to building our new recycling economy.

#2: LAUNCH A RECYCLING MARKET DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE TO ATTRACT AND EXPAND RECYCLING BUSINESSES

Nearly all of the paper, metal and plastics that we collect for recycling is shipped out of state, or even out of the country. This represents a major opportunity to attract new "end market" businesses such as remanufacturers to the state, which will keep materials here in our local economies, create jobs for Coloradans, and reduce transportation pollution. We also need to support existing end market businesses that are already here so they can prosper and expand. We recommend implementing this program under OEDIT to provide end market businesses and secondary processors with:

- Tax breaks such as exemptions for property taxes.
- Funding opportunities through grants and loans.
- Tools and research on recycling markets.
- One-on-one assistance.

#3: CREATE A STATEWIDE WASTE DIVERSION FUNDING TASK FORCE TO STUDY AND RECOMMEND WAYS TO INCREASE FUNDING FOR WASTE REDUCTION, REUSE, RECYCLING AND REMANUFACTURING

Colorado charges a small fee of $1.17 per ton of waste sent to landfills, in addition to the price charged by the landfill. Of that fee, $0.46 per ton goes to support recycling programs and grants. Other states, such as Ohio and Wisconsin, allocate between $2 and $7 per ton to recycling. Colorado currently gives out about $3.5 million annually in the Recycling Resources Economic Opportunity (RREO) grants, yet the fund receives between $8 and $14 million in requests each year. Other states, such as Michigan, are looking to dedicate up to $15 million per year.

To achieve Colorado's recycling goals, we need more dedicated funding, and this task force should have recommendations to the Governor and the legislature by the start of the 2020 legislative session. Funding is needed in four primary areas:

- **Assistance to rural communities** to bring their landfills into compliance with national pollution standards and to expand recycling capacity.
- **Improve infrastructure**, particularly for composting food scraps and recovering construction materials.
- **Incentives for developing end markets** and attracting businesses to the state.
- **Technical support and assistance to local communities** to expand recycling by developing local or regional diversion plans, providing collection carts or other financial incentives, developing policies, collecting data and implementing other programs.

#4: LEAD BY EXAMPLE BY EXPANDING RECYCLING AND COMPOSTING AT STATE AGENCIES, PURCHASING COMPOST FOR STATE PROJECTS, AND SETTING RECYCLING GOALS FOR STATE CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS

One of the best ways to say that "Colorado is open to recycling" is for the new administration to lead by example at state agencies through three high-impact policies:

- **Colorado can require recycling and composting (where available) at all state facilities.** Currently the state only requires agencies to recycle at one building per agency. Other state models include South Dakota, Maine and Wisconsin.
- **Purchasing compost for state projects** is a critical step toward expanding compost markets and infrastructure statewide. The state can require the use of certified compost—with preference to programs that collect food scraps—in landscaping and transportation projects. Stronger demand for the compost end products will help compost processors invest in new equipment and facilities to increase the recovery of food scraps and yard debris throughout Colorado. I
- **State agencies can commit to recycling 50% or more of construction debris** in all state-sponsored building projects. This will help reduce waste in the construction industry as well as stimulate investments in construction recycling facilities for aggregates (concrete, asphalt, brick) as well as clean lumber, metal, and cardboard. Over 40% of Colorado's waste is construction and industrial materials.[xx]

HOW COLORADO CITIES COMPARE AT RECYCLING

To better understand how to move Colorado forward on recycling, we need to first look at what's happening at the local level: how are our communities doing on recycling? Unfortunately, this question isn't that easy to answer. Most Colorado cities do not collect data on their recycling or trash programs, making it difficult to track progress. Those cities that do measure their waste, recycling and composting deserve recognition. This report highlights 27 cities and 30 counties that have taken at least a first step toward tracking their recycling and waste efforts. We hope to encourage every Colorado community to follow their lead and start tracking.

We would like to emphasize that no matter where communities land on this list—whether they are at the top or the bottom—they should be congratulated for having a recycling program in place and for collecting data. This is a critical first step that is still lacking in most Colorado cities.

SECTOR DIVERSION RATES FOR COLORADO COMMUNITIES WITH THE MOST COMPLETE DATA TRACKING

CITY	CITY or COUNTY WIDE	INDUSTRIAL	COMMERCIAL	RESIDENTIAL
Fort Collins	55%	70%	28%	29%
Boulder	51%		35%	52%
Pitkin County	30%	63%		
Durango	30%			
Aspen	26%		20%	40%
Vail	22%		30%	17%

RESIDENTIAL RECYCLING RATES IN COLORADO CITIES WITH DATA COLLECTION

CITY	RESIDENTIAL RECYCLING RATE	CHANGE SINCE 2017
LOVELAND	61%	0%
BOULDER	52%	- 1%
LOUISVILLE	44%	- 4%
ASPEN	40%	+ 1%
LONGMONT	40%	+ 5%
LAFAYETTE	38%	+ 1%
GOLDEN	34%	0%
FORT COLLINS	29%	- 1%
GREENWOOD VILLAGE	27%	- 1%
RIFLE	23%	N/A
SUPERIOR	23%	+ 2%
DENVER	22%	+ 2%
LONE TREE	20%	+ 3%
SHERIDAN	20%	+ 2%
EDGEWATER	18%	0%
GRAND JUNCTION	17%	+ 4%
VAIL	17%	0%
MORRISON*	16%	N/A
SILT	16%	N/A
NEW CASTLE	14%	N/A
FRUITA	11%	0%
NORTHGLENN	11%	0%
MONTROSE	9%	0%
COMMERCE CITY**	N/A	N/A
LYONS**	N/A	N/A
THORNTON**	N/A	N/A

** Data estimated*
*** Tracks data but 2017 recycling rate not reported*
**** We apologize to any city that was missed from this list. We attempted to contact as many of Colorado's largest cities as possible for data. Please contact us to be added to the list for future tracking.*

RECYCLING RATES IN COLORADO COUNTIES WITH DATA

COUNTY	RECYCLING RATE	DATA YEAR
ANNUAL DATA COLLECTION		
BOULDER	40%	2017
PITKIN	30%	2017
SUMMIT	23%	2016
DENVER*	22%	2017
EAGLE	22%	2017
ONE-TIME RECYCLING RATES & WASTE STUDIES		
LARIMER	35%	2017
OURAY, SAN MIGUEL	20%	2016
ALAMOSA, CONEJOS, COSTILLA, MINERAL, RIO GRANDE, SAGUACHE	18%	2016
LA PLATA	17%	2014
CHAFFEE	16%	2016
LAKE	16%	2016
CUSTER	15%	2016
GRAND	14%	2014
SAN JUAN	14%	2014
FREMONT	12%	2016
EL PASO, TELLER	11%	2010
DOLORES	7%	2014
MONTEZUMA	7%	2014
BENT, CROWLEY, OTERO	6%	2016
PUEBLO	4-6%	2017
ARCHULETA	3%	2014
WASTE STUDIES BUT NO RECYCLING RATES		
BACA, HUERFANO, LAS ANIMAS		2017
GARFIELD, MOFFAT, RIO BLANCO, ROUTT		2017
MESA, DELTA, MONTROSE, AND GUNNISON		in progress