

ELEMENT 171: RHODE ISLAND COMPREHENSIVE SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT PLAN

01 INTRODUCTION

Section 23-19-11(6) of the General Laws calls for the preparation of a comprehensive solid waste management plan in which the Rhode Island Resource Recovery Corporation's statewide resource recovery system development plan shall be a component part. The plan was first adopted by the State Planning Council, as Element 171 of the State Guide Plan, on November 14, 1996. It has since been updated and re-adopted for the period April 12, 2007 through April 12, 2012.

This Plan has several purposes. In addition to being an element of the State Guide Plan, it:

- Serves as the long-range policy and program guidance document for the RI Resource Recovery Corporation and other State agencies.
- Functions as the Statewide Resource Recovery System Development Plan containing 20-year projections of waste generation, recycling, and disposal compared with capacity.
- Guides the activities of Department of Environmental Management and serves as the state solid waste management plan as required by the Federal Resource Conservation and Recovery Act.

02 ISSUES ADDRESSED

- Identification of management needs related to specific wastes and recommend waste-specific management programs, on a waste-by-waste basis;
- Identification of economically feasible strategies to reduce the generation of solid waste and maximizing the diversion of material from ultimate disposal by recycling or re-use of recovered resources;
- Identification of policies that recommend programs and facilities to meet identified needs for the management of specific wastes according to the hierarchy of solid waste management¹ methods adopted by the RI Department of Environmental Management and the US Environmental Protection Agency;
- Providing a framework to identify the type, and project the need for, additional solid waste management facilities;
- Guiding the siting of future landfill areas and other solid waste management facilities;
- Assessing the effectiveness of all management programs;
- Addressing incentives for generators, handlers, and managers of solid waste;
- Guiding the fee-setting process.

03 GOAL, OBJECTIVES, AND POLICIES

The goal for the management of solid waste in Rhode Island is:

¹ In order of priority:

- (1) Reduction of the amount of source waste generated;
- (2) Source separation and recycling;
- (3) Waste processing to reduce the volume of waste necessary for land disposal;
- (4) Land disposal.

Environmentally sound management of solid waste that protects and preserves the environment and public resources, maximizes the useful life of the Central Landfill, and promotes the convenience, health, comfort, safety, and welfare of the people of the state at reasonable cost including, in order of preference, 1) waste prevention, 2) source separation and recycling, and 3) processing and disposal.

The following presents a framework of objectives and associated policies for solid waste management in Rhode Island to provide guidance in planning and management of the various wastes covered in the Plan. In most cases, they reflect and/or complement established legislative goals.

Objective 1: Reduce the amount of solid waste generated.

Policies include:

- A. Encourage industrial processes that generate smaller amounts of wastes.
- B. Maximize resource conservation to the extent economically feasible.
- C. Provide incentives for residents and the public and private sectors to reduce waste.
- D. Educate consumers regarding the impact of purchases on waste prevention.
- E. Support implementation of Pay-As-You-Throw (PAYT) systems.
- F. Provide technical assistance or referrals to maximize waste prevention and recycling.
- G. Plan waste management components in mandated hierarchical priority order.

Objective 2: Maximize recovery of post consumer materials FOR reuse in the manufacture of new products.

Policies include:

- A. Expand recycling and reuse in the most efficient and cost-effective manner possible and promote the beneficial reuse of materials.
- B. Educate consumers regarding materials recovery and encourage purchase of recycled content products, and products with reduced toxicity and packaging.
- C. Work with state, national, and regional organizations and other states to develop markets for recyclables and recycled content products.
- D. Ensure that adequate MRF capacity remains available to process all municipal recyclables.
- E. Facilitate and encourage State and private procurement of recycled goods.
- F. Promote research and development into recycling processes and technologies.

Objective 3: Provide for necessary and reliable solid waste management facilities and programs.

Policies include:

- A. Provide adequate materials recovery facility capacity, either directly or through a private company.
- B. Develop only facilities and services essential to serve Rhode Island's citizens and businesses and only after conducting feasibility and cost-benefit analyses.
- C. Encourage private industry to continue to play a key role in the state's solid waste management programs.

Objective 4: Optimize the Utilization of Central Landfill Capacity in order to maximize landfill life.

Policies include:

- A. Utilize compaction methods that daily maximize the density of solid waste disposed.
- B. Utilize daily and intermediate landfill cover methods and technologies that minimize consumption of landfill airspace by cover materials.

- C. Ensure that landfill operations optimize airspace utilization.
- D. Consider all costs associated with the landfill when setting disposal fees, making certain that fees cover all costs.

Objective 5: Provide maximum protection of human health and the environment.

Policies include:

- A. Conduct solid waste management activities in an environmentally sound manner.
- B. Minimize landfilling.
- C. Remove toxins from the waste stream, and prevent their leaching into the environment during processing and disposal, to the extent feasible.
- D. Consider, when facility siting, the environmental impacts related to transportation, including fuel consumption and vehicle emissions on air quality and transportation system loading.
- E. Ensure that solid waste management facilities are operated in a safe manner, in compliance with all applicable rules and regulations.

Objective 6: Maintain reasonable costs.

Policies include:

- A. Develop a comprehensive, integrated, cost-effective, and innovative solid waste management system for Rhode Island by providing incentives and processes for preserving landfill space and lowering costs.
- B. Perform comparative cost analyses on a per-ton basis in order to ensure that RIRRC procures the most cost-effective facilities and programs.

04 RECOMMENDATIONS

- Establish of a waste prevention task force. This group will set waste prevention goals, establish a waste prevention program, and work with RIRRC and DEM to promote waste prevention within both government and the private sector.

The Plan contains over forty recommendations concerning recycling including:

- Adjust the “municipal cap” to coincide with municipal recycling targets. The municipal cap is the tonnage of waste that each municipality is allowed to dump at the Landfill at a reduced fee. Any amount above the cap is charged the higher, commercial tipping fee. By the progressive lowering of each municipality’s cap and raising the target recycling rate from 20 to 35%, there will be a financial incentive for each municipality to improve its recycling programs.
- Various financial and technical assistance programs to assist communities implement improved recycling.
- Increased enforcement of solid waste regulations.
- The incorporation of recycling into facility permitting.
- The acceptance of commercial material at RIRRC’S material recycling facility.
- Eliminating the “put or pay” provision in RIRRC commercial disposal contracts.
- Allow municipalities to collect and deliver non-residential recyclables to the MRF.
- One serious shortcoming is that multi-family residential housing is treated as commercial waste instead of municipal waste and consequently the recycling rates for multi-family housing are very low. This plan calls for the statewide institution of residential multi-family recycling.
- Improvement in State agency and school recycling.

- Expansion of leaf and yard debris composting.

The third waste management priority (after prevention and recycling) is waste processing. The most common form of waste processing is incineration but this is currently banned in Rhode Island. However, the Plan does call for the ongoing study and monitoring of waste reduction technologies with the hope that emerging technologies will eliminate or avoid the pollution and health concerns of traditional incineration.

One other notable recommendation of this Plan is to conduct a study on the economics of managing solid waste in Rhode Island.