

Tips to Increase Recycling Participation

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Local units of government, called responsible units or RUs, implement and enforce municipal recycling programs statewide. RUs must meet recyclable material collection standards based on pounds per capita that differ for rural and urban areas. These standards are defined in ch. NR 544, Wis. Adm. Code. RUs that do not meet the collection standard, which is reported annually to the Department of Natural Resources, can utilize the tips below to help make improvements.

1. Ensure tonnage from certain institutions are counted in RU recycling tonnage

If residents are included in the Wisconsin Department of Administration census counts, the RU can use the recycling tonnage collected from these facilities toward their overall tonnage. Institutional populations counted by the DOA include people residing in correctional facilities, nursing homes, military barracks, and universities/colleges. Note that only *residential* recycling tonnages may be included. For example, a university may include recycling from dorms and cafeterias but not from classroom buildings. The RU should retain records of the amount of recyclables collected and who collected them.

2. Request tonnage collected through private curbside pick-up

Residents may contract with a hauler for the convenience of curbside recycling. Unless the hauler reports its recycling to the RU, this practice can result in an under-reporting of total residential recycling. RUs may request the recycling tonnages collected from the hauler. Because haulers are not required to provide tonnages unless they contract with the RU, the RU should request this information early so haulers are prepared.

3. Consider changing drop-off recycling site hours or location

If residents are not using a drop-off site due to limited hours or inconvenient location, then the facility is not meeting residential needs. The RU must consider changing hours or location, or switch to curbside collection. By law, drop-off sites are required to be open at least two days per month for five hours each day.

4. Increase recycling education and awareness

To ensure residents have the information they need to recycle properly, RUs are required to carry out an annual recycling outreach program. RUs can share information about their recycling services via mailings, newsletters, websites, town events, email and new resident info packets. The DNR has recycling publications to print or order free on its website. Haulers or material recovery facilities may also provide flyers and other information.

5. Remind residents it is illegal to burn recyclables

It is unlawful to burn most recyclables per state law and local ordinance. State law only allows burning small amounts of dry paper and cardboard, natural fibers, and clean untreated wood. Local government may have stricter requirements. Unrecyclable items should be disposed of in a landfill or other approved facility. RUs can inform residents that burning recyclables is not only unlawful but also poses a human health and wildfire risk.

6. Make connections with haulers to receive timely recycling tonnage

Law requires haulers to give RUs information regarding recyclable tonnages collected under contract within four weeks of written request. Requesting tonnages well before the annual report is due (April 30 each year) helps ensure the hauler has time to respond. RUs may also consider including a date by which the hauler is required to provide the recycling tonnages in their contract. See Tip #2, above, if the RU is not under contract with a hauler in the community.

7. Count materials collected by local non-profits (youth group, church, etc.)

RUs can account for donated material by asking collection groups to provide the weight of the materials collected, such as aluminum cans, and adding this number to their annual report under "Other Processors."

8. Tag bins used incorrectly to alert residents

Directly tagging flyers onto recycling bins can be an effective way to address non-recycling or "under-recycling" by residents. It can also remind residents who mix recyclable and non-recyclable items. Bin-tagging begins when collection crews or RU staff check bin contents before collection. Crews can randomly "spot check" bins or be aware of addresses that consistently do not put out recycling for collection. Based on observations, the RU (or its hauler) can tag the bin and follow the steps outlined in its Compliance Assurance Plan.

9. Work with DNR Recycling staff to discuss strategies related to RU boundaries and generation of recyclables

Tribal and municipal RUs with boundaries and populations that overlap should work with DNR staff to determine which population to use when calculating per capita recycling tonnage. Staff can also help with strategies if the RU has fewer recyclables because of a population with a religion/culture that creates less packaging waste, such as Amish communities. However, there may be other opportunities to count recyclables as described above. Even with the decline in print newspaper, an increased focus on reuse, and lighter-weight material, the standard set by the DNR is achievable. The rural recycling standard comes out to 3.6 ounces/person/day. A single piece of postal mail weighs about 1 ounce.

Recycling facilities in the state accept a variety of materials, such as mail, magazines, paper towel cores, paperboard such as cereal boxes, plastic drink bottles, detergent bottles, milk jugs, glass bottles, glass food jars, and pet food cans. Many recycling facilities accept an even wider range of recyclables. Check with your hauler!



Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources

Waste and Materials Management Program

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