



2020 Annual Report

Tompkins County Department of
Recycling and Materials Management

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The Mission of the Tompkins County Department of Recycling and Materials Management (TCRMM) is to develop and implement a sustainable materials management strategy for Tompkins County consistent with the New York State solid waste management hierarchy that is environmentally sound, cost-effective, socially responsible and safe. This is accomplished through coordinated administrative, operational, and educational programs that maximize diversion with the 4R’s (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, Rebuy) as a focal point.

Director's Report

2020 was a challenging year for the Department due to the changes in operations and procedures with the COVID pandemic and a continued and significant loss in recycling revenues. The department and our contractors continued to provide operational service to the residents, businesses and institutions in Tompkins County while complying with COVID policies and procedures issued by New York State and the County. The County legislature committed to continuing the long-standing and successful recycling program despite the significant cost increase.

One of the key factors contributing to low market values locally and nationally is increased contamination in the recycling stream. This is due to lack of clarity and enforcement of acceptable materials during changing markets. To reduce contamination from residential curbside collection, the Department developed an enforcement plan. The plan included the "Recycling Right" education initiative but also incorporated a warning and rejection phase in which bins with unacceptable material would be left at the curb.

Fortunately, the Department continued to implement numerous successful programs to divert materials from waste:

- 15 drop spots throughout the County continued to receive residential food scraps. The new food scraps transfer building at the Recycling and Solid Waste Center continued to accept both residential and commercial loads of source-separated food scraps. After collection, this material is delivered to Cayuga Compost in Trumansburg for processing. The resulting compost is sold in bags and bulk loads to residents and commercial entities to enhance soil conditions for landscaping and other applications.
- The Department began implementing a pilot program for edible food donation and food scrap collection at several low-income apartments. This program is funded through a NYSDEC grant. Due to COVID restrictions only the food scrap collection took place. The remaining food waste reduction education and food sharing aspects will take place in 2021.
- Six household hazardous waste collection events took place in 2020 as planned. Residents use an online form to register for the events.

- The Department's strong community education and outreach program has embraced the NYS "Recycle Right" campaign to reduce contamination at the curb. Also, the Department launched its enforcement effort to warn residents if non-acceptable items have been placed in the curbside bins. In 2021, the warning system will be replaced with rejecting bins with contamination. The resident will know why the bin is rejected.
- Public space recycling collection continued at 10 locations in the County. Large secure bins for recycling and trash are provided for public use and serviced by Department staff.
- Educational presentations, outreach events, and tours of the Recycling Center were curtailed in 2020. Virtual events took place but were limited.
- Environmental monitoring, inspections and maintenance of the two closed county landfills in compliance with NYS Department of Environmental Conservation regulations. Department staff issued an RFP for continued assistance by an environmental consulting firm to conduct groundwater and residential sampling at both landfills. Five firms responded to the RFP and Barton and Loguidice of Syracuse was awarded the multi-year contract.

The Department and County Attorney issued a final RFP in accordance with GML120W. The five-year contract for facility modifications, operations and marketing of recycling materials was awarded to Casella LLC. The cost was significantly higher than in the past resulting in a budget and annual fee increase.

As we develop our 2022 budget, the Department will strive to balance services and programs with stabilizing fees through cost reductions and seeking additional revenues through grants. It is likely that the recycling market condition will improve gradually in 2021 due to new domestic paper mills becoming operational.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve the Legislature and our community to reduce waste and lower the climate impact of waste.



Barbara Eckstrom
Director of Recycling and Materials Management

2020 By the Numbers



14,795 tons of recyclables collected and processed at the RSWC

1,593.8 tons of food scraps processed by Cayuga Compost

546 tons of residential food scraps collected at 15 Food Scraps Drop Spots



1 million + curbside recycling stops made by Casella Recycling trucks

1,365 resident attendees at Household Hazardous Waste Drop-off Events



19,000 customers assisted by Administrative Staff

Program Highlights

Recycling

This program provides recycling opportunities for County residents, businesses and institutions. Through a contract with Casella Waste Systems Inc., the County received and processed 14,795 tons of recyclables at the Recycling and Solid Waste Center (RSWC). The facility includes a convenient public drop-off that accepts single stream recyclables, residential and commercial food scraps, and additional materials for recycling. Tompkins County also partners with Cayuga Compost to offer food scraps recycling programs. Other aspects of the recycling program include the ReBusiness Partners, Borrow-A-Bin, Public Space Recycling, and public outreach and education.

Program Goals

- Provide a local facility to process and market recyclable materials collected through the curbside and drop-off programs including educational information, direct assistance, and community support for recycling.
- Provide a program to comply with all applicable federal, state and local laws.
- Support an overall goal of 85% waste diversion by 2030.
- Increase recycling tonnage for food scraps and other materials.
- Reduce contamination in recycling streams.

Highlights

- 14,795 tons of recyclables were accepted at the RSWC.
- Cayuga Compost collected and processed 1,539.8 tons of food scraps, with approximately 546 tons collected from the residential drop spots.
- Department staff issued a Request for Proposals for operating the RSWC and for processing recyclable materials in 2021.
- A total of 15 Food Scraps Recycling Drop Spots received residential food scraps including: the Brooktondale Community Center, Tompkins County Highway Department, Cayuga Compost, Cayuga Heights Village Hall, Cornell Cooperative Extension, Danby Town Hall, Dryden Town Highway Department, East Hill Plaza, Groton Town Clerk's Office, Hancock St, Lansing Village Office, Newfield Town Hall, the Recycling and Solid Waste Center, and Trumansburg Department of Public Works sites.
- A shed was installed at the Groton Town Clerk's Office.
- The mobile drop spot was used at the Brooktondale Community Center, East Hill Plaza, East Hill Farmers Market, Groton Town Clerk's Office (prior to shed installation), Hancock St, and Newfield Town Hall locations.
- The RSWC accepted residential and commercial single stream recyclables, source-separated single stream recyclables, and source-separated food scraps from residents and commercial haulers.
- The County contracted with Buffalo Biodiesel to remove approximately 2.49 tons of Fats Oil and Grease (FOG) material collected at the RSWC.

- A “Recycle Right” campaign to educate the public about proper recycling was continued in 2020. In person outreach events were cancelled due to COVID-19.
- Distributed 556 kitchen caddies and 231 transportation containers to participants in the food scraps drop-off program.
- In person educational presentations and/or tours were replaced with 13 remote presentations due to public health measures. Staff reached approximately 215 individuals through presentations.
- Staff continually updated the RecycleTompkins.org website with up-to-date information and continued to support the “Find My Recycling Day” and “What Do I Do With...?” tools as well as Household Hazardous Waste drop off event registration. Residents used these tools to view recycling schedules 50,111 times and search for information about specific items 19,993 times. 79,644 users visited the website.
- Staff developed a plan to conduct waste assessments for local businesses and organizations remotely through the ReBusiness Partners Program. 2 remote waste assessments were completed.



Staff collects food scraps from 15 locations throughout the County, including the Trumansburg Department of Public Works, pictured here.

Program Highlights

Recycling Collection

Through this program, the County provides bi-weekly countywide curbside collection of recyclable materials, which are transported to the County-owned RSWC. TCRMM contracts with Casella Waste Systems Inc. through a competitive bid process. County staff monitors and tracks service requests from the public to ensure quality service from the contractor. Recycling bins are available for sale at the TCRMM offices, and R-decals are provided free of charge to allow for flexibility in collection receptacles. Public education is an important component of this program.

Approximately 44,634 homes receive curbside recycling collection as well as an estimated 2,372 small businesses.



Curbside recycling is collected from over 44,000 homes throughout Tompkins County.

Program Goals:

- Provide convenient, cost-effective residential recycling opportunities through curbside collection through a ten-year contract with Casella and a public drop-off area at the RSWC.
- Monitor service calls and responses to maintain quality service for the curbside collection program, and minimize recycling collection complaints year over year.
- Enforce all applicable federal, state and local laws for mandatory recycling.

Highlights

- A 2020-2021 Curbside Recycling Guidelines brochure was made available to all residents in Tompkins County. These guidelines are available at the Recycling and Materials Management Office, municipal offices, grocery store service desks, and online at RecycleTompkins.Org.
- In 2020 TCRMM tracked 331 service calls regarding the curbside recycling collection service. This service-based contract was monitored closely throughout the year to maintain a high quality of service.
- To enhance communication and response systems regarding service requests, staff recorded data about truck routes traveled.
- Public Space Recycling locations in Tompkins County were serviced and monitored throughout the year. These included: two locations at the Greater Ithaca Activities Center (GIAC), the Wood St Skate Park in Ithaca, Hancock St in Ithaca, Stewart Park in Ithaca, the Tompkins County Courthouse in Ithaca, the Tompkins County Human Services Building in Ithaca, the Tompkins County Library in Ithaca, Montgomery Park in Dryden, and two locations on Main St in Trumansburg. No new locations were established in 2020 due to COVID-19. It is estimated that 2.54 tons of material were diverted through this program in 2020.
- In 2020 TCRMM completed an audit of residential curbside recycling to better understand the contamination rate in Tompkins County. Educational efforts along with the Curbside Enforcement Plan will continue, and a second audit is scheduled for early 2021 to observe the effect of Rejection and Warning stickers.



The Department ran ads informing residents about curbside recycling enforcement as part of the Recycle Right campaign.

Program Highlights

Waste Reduction

Through this program, Tompkins County Recycling & Materials Management supports the community, local economy, and the environment by encouraging innovative waste reduction and reuse projects. Many of these initiatives are accomplished through partnerships with local organizations including Cornell Cooperative Extension's (CCE) Compost Education Program, and Finger Lakes ReUse, which closed briefly in the Spring, but was able to reopen with precautions in place and continues to prove to be an important community resource. With schools on pause due to COVID-19, the year did not leave much opportunity for collaborating with school Green Teams. TCRMM continued work on a grant project from the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) to further food waste reduction, recycling, and donation efforts at apartment complexes, with a project extension due to the pandemic. Staff worked with a consultant to benchmark and identify best practices to advance Environmentally Preferred Purchasing within the county, and proposed a policy which was adopted by the legislature in January 2021.

Approximately 66,000 individuals were reached through waste reduction programs, including residents, students, businesses, and other community members.

Program Goals

- Reduce both the volume and toxicity of the waste stream by providing waste reduction, reuse and green purchasing programs and education to businesses, schools, municipalities and residents.
- Maintain community reuse efforts by promoting the mission and work of Finger Lakes Reuse
- Support the statewide goal of achieving 2.1 lbs. of MSW/person/day by 2030.
- Maintain support for home composting through a contract with Cornell Cooperative Extension.

Highlights

- Through home composting, it is estimated approximately 4,088 tons of food scraps and 6,211 tons of yard waste was diverted, showing a slight increase in home composting since 2018. The Compost Learning Collaborative (CLC) diverted an additional ton of food scraps at various sites.
- Continuation of support for Finger Lakes ReUse which diverted approximately 725 tons including materials like books, building materials, computers and electronics, furniture, house wares, and textiles over the course of 2020. A new location was opened at the Reuse Caboose.
- A food waste prevention campaign was continued through a social media campaign promoting tips and tools for food waste prevention.

- Staff implemented weekly on-site food scraps collection at two apartment complexes as part of a New York State DEC grant. Work will continue in 2021 with an expansion of food scraps recycling plus food waste prevention and donation efforts.
- The Legislature prioritized increasing Environmentally Preferred Procurement. Staff researched policy and drafted a resolution to incorporate this into a purchasing policy update.

Program Highlights

Disposal

In 2020, Tompkins County transported 16,759 tons of municipal solid waste (MSW) from the Recycling & Solid Waste Center (RSWC) to nearby landfills through a contract with Ontario County, Seneca Meadows, Hyland Landfill (Angelica) and Chemung County. This program also includes enforcement of Chapter 140 of the County Code to prevent violations related to trash tag, hauler licensing, mandatory recycling, and illegal dumping laws.

Program Goals

- To provide safe and environmentally sound disposal practices for Tompkins County waste generators.
- Minimize illegal disposal violations in the County.

Highlights

- The Department continued to cull recyclables from commercial trash, diverting 102 tons from the landfill through recycling.
- The County issued 21 hauler licenses and 101 licensed vehicles in 2020. There were 74 County Code cases investigated: 70 for illegal dumping, 2 for trash tag violations, 2 for dumping on private property.



Vehicles weigh in and out at the Recycling and Solid Waste Center Weigh Station.

Program Highlights

Old Landfills

Tompkins County has two closed landfills, the Hillview Road Landfill in South Danby/North Spencer, and the Caswell Road Landfill in the Town of Dryden. This program includes monitoring, maintenance, and leachate removal at the two sites, which are regulated by the NYSDEC.



Department Staff uses a pickup truck and sampling equipment to monitor the closed landfills.

Program Goals

- Perform routine, quarterly and annual reporting and inspections, regular maintenance, and leachate removal required by NYSDEC closure permits.
- Routine inspections identify maintenance items that are then scheduled for repair or budgeted for in the following year depending on the magnitude of the problem.

Highlights

- The Hillview and Caswell landfill sites have a total of 64 monitoring wells, including 13 residential locations. There are also 23 manholes and 18 cleanouts along the perimeter collection systems and 88 gas vents.
- Of the 64 monitoring points, 13 were eliminated in 2013 in an agreement between the Hillview Road Advisory Committee and Tompkins County, and approved by the NYS DEC. These wells are no longer monitored on an annual basis but are still maintained.

- Department staff received 5 Proposals for conducting groundwater and residential well sampling at both landfills. The contract was awarded to Barton and Loguidice consulting engineers from Syracuse, NY.
- Staff perform weekly inspections to ensure contractual pumping of two underground leachate storage tanks at each landfill are fulfilled. Leachate is hauled to the Ithaca Area Wastewater Treatment Plant for treatment.
- Monitoring wells routinely require maintenance that includes sanding, repainting, flagging and concrete apron replacement as required by NYS DEC.
- These closed landfills are mowed, plowed, and maintained during the year to remove rapid growth of vegetation as well as to provide a setting for accurate sampling. Each landfill footprint consists of approximately 30 acres that require mowing in July.
- The amount of leachate removed from Hillview in 2020 was 207,500 gallons. The amount of leachate removed from Caswell in 2020 was 1,135,000 gallons.

Program Highlights

Household Hazardous Waste (HHW)

The HHW collection program directs the proper management of residential household hazardous waste and small quantities of hazardous waste from qualified non-residential generators (i.e., businesses and community organizations) through a contract with Clean Harbors. Examples of HHW materials accepted through the program include paints and stains, lawn and automobile care products, and pesticides.

Program Goals

- Diversion of hazardous wastes from the waste stream and the effective management of that waste.
- Compliance with NYSDEC permit required inspections, maintenance, waste management and reporting.

Highlights

- There were a total of 1,365 residents at the six (6) Household Hazardous Waste drop off events conducted in 2020. Residents use an online registration form at RecycleTompkins.org to schedule appointments.
- There were 10 non-residential Conditionally Exempt Small Quantity Generators (CESQG'S) and an additional 21 businesses bringing in universal wastes such as fluorescent tubes.
- There was a total of 24,324 pounds of solids, and 19,010 gallons of liquid hazardous universal wastes diverted from the waste stream in 2020.



Residents line up at the HHW Depot to be unloaded by Clean Harbors staff.

Program Highlights

Administration

Administrative staff assists customers as well as department staff. Over 19,000 customers were assisted in 2020 with information about recycling, composting, trash disposal, household hazardous waste and waste reduction programs.

Highlights

- The Administrative staff handled 9,200 customer inquiries over the phone and completed 10,667 transactions at the front desk (sales of permits, trash disposal coupons and punch cards, and recycling and compost bins) for a total of 19,867 customers served. The front desk also distributed 240 food scraps recycling toolkits at no charge to residents.
- The Department accepts the sale of permits, punch cards and coupons online through its website. There were 556 online transactions in 2020, totaling \$31,801.
- The Administrative staff assisted customers with navigating a newly-designed website and taking advantage of its new features - “Find My Recycling Day” and the “What do I do with...?” materials database.

2020 Organizational Chart



Financial Information

FINANCIAL INFORMATION

The goal of financing the Department of Recycling and Materials Management is to enable the development, maintenance, and sustainability of an integrated solid waste management system that facilitates recycling, composting, waste reduction and other diversion activities to the greatest extent possible. Where possible, the financing system is also designed to create incentives for diversion of materials from disposal. The Department is enterprise funded, and therefore no revenue is obtained from Tompkins County property taxes. The sources of revenue are:

- Disposal Fees: Waste is accepted at the Recycling and Solid Waste Center (RSWC) from Tompkins County residents, businesses, and licensed haulers. A disposal fee is charged to do so.
- Solid Waste Annual Fee: The annual fee helps to defray the costs of the Department's programs and services, exclusive of waste disposal. The annual fee pays for the Recycling and Solid Waste Center, curbside recycling collection, waste reduction programs, Household Hazardous Waste, and maintaining closed landfills.
- Recycling Revenue: The Department receives revenue from the sale of recyclable materials.
- Grants: The Department actively seeks available grants to defray some of the cost of its programs, including:
 - NYSDEC Municipal Waste Reduction & Recycling
 - NYSDEC Food Waste Reduction & Recycling
 - NYSDEC Climate Smart Communities
 - NYSDEC Household Hazardous Waste
- Miscellaneous Revenue: Other forms of revenue include the sale of recycling and compost bins, fines, permits and licensing fees.