



2021 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

During the first half of 2021, the Department was challenged by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and a continuing loss in recycling revenues. The Department and our contractors continued to provide normal operational services while complying with COVID-19 policies and procedures issued by New York State and Tompkins County.

The County legislature upheld its long-term commitment to waste diversion, recycling, and other programs despite the significantly higher cost associated with the new five-year contract with Casella for the operation of the Recycling and Solid Waste Center. In addition, the Legislature reaffirmed the enterprise funding structure that includes revenues and fees to pay for the Department expenses without the use of property taxes.

Fortunately recycling revenues became more robust in the second half of 2021 due to the opening of new paper mills in the U.S. This allowed stability in program planning to best serve our residents, businesses, and educational institutions. The “Recycle Right” education campaign along with rejection of contaminated single-stream materials resulted in a very low contamination rate of 3%. This is substantially lower than most other communities in the US, resulting in higher quality recyclable material.

The Department continued to provide numerous programs as part of a plan to implement a sustainable materials management strategy for Tompkins County:

- The list of materials that are accepted for recycling is extensive. Single-stream recyclables are accepted at the Center from residents, businesses, and educational institutions. In addition, other recyclables including scrap metal, batteries, textiles, electronics, rigid plastics, propane tanks, tires, and yard waste are accepted at various drop off areas at the Center.
- Residents and businesses continued to bring food scraps for composting to 16 drop spots throughout the County. The Department hauled the food scraps from drop spots and County offices to the Recycling and Solid Waste Center food scrap transfer station. The material was then delivered to a low-tech processing facility in Trumansburg through a contract with a local excavating business, Cayuga Compost. The finished product is sold to residents in bags and bulk material is sold to landscapers and other end-users.

- Six household hazardous waste collection events were held at the DEPOT at the Recycling Center for residential and small quantity generator customers through a NYSDEC permit.
- Curbside recycling collection is provided to all residences with 4 or less units. Apartments and mobile home park recycling is collected through various container and dumpster types.
- The Department accepts trash at the Recycling and Solid Waste Center with payment by the ton or through coupons and punch cards. The trash is transported to a state permitted landfill in Ontario County.
- The two closed landfills in Tompkins County are maintained and environmentally monitored using a well-established series of wells. This has been the case for 36 years and will continue indefinitely. The maintenance includes cap stability, gas vent repairs, and evaluation of the integrity of the leachate collection system.
- Educational presentations, outreach events and tours were curtailed due to COVID safety procedures however virtual presentations were conducted. Extensive digital media efforts provide public education through our website, twitter, Facebook, advertising, and printed information.

As we develop our 2023 budget and work plan, the Department will strive to balance services and programs to reduce waste while developing a financially stable plan for the next few years.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve the Legislature and our community to reduce waste and decrease the climate impact of landfilling waste. During 2023, I recommend that the County Administrator and Legislature form a committee to re-assess the existing funding structure and focus on user fees for colleges.



Barbara Eckstrom
Director of Recycling and Materials Management



13,296 tons of recyclables collected and processed at the **RSWC**

2,375 tons of food scraps
processed by Cayuga Compost

495 tons of residential food scraps
collected at 16 Food Scraps Drop Spots



1 million + curbside recycling stops made by **Casella Recycling** trucks

1,470 resident attendees
at Household Hazardous Waste
Drop-off Events



22,000 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 13,296 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 food scraps, and additional materials for recycling that aren't accepted at the curb. Other aspects of the recycling program include ReBusiness Partners, Borrow-A-Bin, Public Space Recycling, and public outreach and education.

Program Goals

- Provide a local facility to transfer, transport, and market recyclable materials collected through the curbside and drop-off programs including educational information, direct assistance, and community support for recycling.
- Accept commercial recyclables from haulers, contractors, and educational institutions.
- 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

- 13,296 tons of recyclables were accepted at the RSWC.
- Casella Recycling implemented the contract for operating the RSWC and for processing recyclable materials in 2021.
- The RSWC accepted residential and commercial single stream recyclables, source-separated recyclables, and source-separated organics from residents and commercial haulers.
- Communications staff conducted awareness campaigns centered around recycling and food scraps recycling. Despite the ongoing pandemic, 152 students and 392 adults were reached through in-person and remote presentations, community events, and tours of the Recycling and Solid Waste Center. Staff offered 2 tours and 17 presentations, and tabled at 5 outreach events.
- 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 65,819 times and search for information about specific items 27,354 times. 81,166 unique users visited the website.
- Staff developed a plan to conduct waste assessments for local businesses and organizations remotely through the ReBusiness Partners Program. 7 waste assessments were completed.

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 2,348 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 2021-2022 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. Communications staff also distribute the guidelines at community events and at popular community hubs such as café's when a new issue is printed.
- In 2021 TCRMM tracked 300 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 2021 due to COVID-19 however one new location is planned for 2022. It is estimated that 2.33 tons of material were diverted through this program in 2021.
- In 2021 TCRMM completed a second audit of residential curbside recycling to compare to the 2020 audit and study the contamination rate in Tompkins County. The overall contamination rate from the 2020 curbside recycling audit was 5.37%, and 3.94% in the second audit in 2021, a 1.43% reduction. The Curbside Enforcement Plan and the Recycling Right educational program plan were contributing factors to these results.

Program Highlights

Organics

Through this program, Tompkins County Recycling and Materials Management works to implement a sustainable materials management strategy for the organics segment of the waste stream which includes food waste and yard waste. Through food waste prevention, food donation, food scraps recycling, yard waste recycling, and more, the Department aims to reduce the amount of organic waste sent to landfills.

Food scraps and yard waste collected through Department programs are recycled through a public-private partnership with Cayuga Compost, located in Trumansburg.

Program Goals

- To implement strategies in keeping with the US EPA Food Recovery Hierarchy.
- Provide a clean, convenient, and comfortable food scraps recycling program for residents.
- Accept commercial organics from haulers, contractors, businesses, and educational institutions.
- Provide yard waste disposal and recycling services at the Recycling and Solid Waste Center.

Highlights

- Cayuga Compost collected and processed 2,375 tons of food scraps, with approximately 495 tons collected from the residential drop spots.
- A total of 16 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, East Hill Farmers' Market, 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. Approximately 495 tons of organics were collected from these locations.
- The mobile drop spot was used at the Brooktondale Community Center, East Hill Plaza, East Hill Farmers Market, and Hancock St locations.
- Staff hosted a Food Scraps Drop Spot Compost Giveaway event in early May in celebration of International Compost Awareness Week and New York State Compost Awareness Week. Cayuga Compost donated 2,720 pounds of compost to 104 residents through this giveaway event.
- The County contracted with Buffalo Biodiesel to remove approximately 2.9 tons of Fats Oil and Grease (FOG) material collected at the RSWC.
- Distributed 448 kitchen caddies to participants in the food scraps drop-off program.
- Staff implemented weekly on-site food scraps collection at three apartment complexes as part of a New York State DEC grant and offered six free food waste prevention cooking classes in conjunction with Cornell Cooperative Extension of Tompkins County's Nutrition Program.



A resident receives compost at the Hancock St Drop Spot during the Food Scrap Drop Spot Compost Giveaway event in May.

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 and Nutrition Programs. 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 in 2020 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.

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 4,410 tons of food scraps and 6,395 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.
- Communications staff conducted an awareness campaign to encourage reusable bag usage, timed to coincide with the New York State plastic bag ban. "Save Some Green, Bring Your Own Bags" ads were run in local newspapers in addition to press releases and social media. Funds from the Tompkins County \$.05 paper bag fee were used to purchase and distribute quality reusable bags to fixed- and low-income individuals per state and local law.
- A food waste prevention campaign was continued through a social media campaign promoting tips and tools for food waste prevention.
- The Legislature prioritized increasing Environmentally Preferred Procurement. Staff researched policy and drafted a resolution to incorporate this into a purchasing policy update.



The Save Some Green, Bring Your Own Bags campaign connected the concepts of cost-savings and environmental conservation in relation to reusable bags.

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 New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (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 NYSDEC. These wells are no longer monitored on an annual basis but are still maintained.

- Staff worked with Barton and Loguidice consulting engineers from Syracuse, NY to perform groundwater and residential sampling.
- 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 2021 was 406,200 gallons. The amount of leachate removed from Caswell in 2021 was 2,053,500 gallons.
 - TCRMM records the daily amount of leachate collected. A three-year average of these records was used to budget handling 1,599,425 gallons of leachate in 2021. Above-average rainfall in 2021 led to leachate-associated costs exceeding the budget by approximately \$30,000.

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, Inc. The hazardous waste vendor handles material in a hierarchy of first reusing viable products, recycling eligible materials, then using material at a waste to energy facility, and finally sending remaining material to a specialized landfill. Examples of HHW materials accepted through the program include paints and stains, lawn and automobile care products, and pesticides. The HHW program provides a convenient, and sometimes sole, way of keeping hazardous materials from accumulating in households and groundwater.

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 was a total of 1,470 residents at the six (6) Household Hazardous Waste drop off events conducted in 2021. Residents use an online registration form at RecycleTompkins.org to schedule appointments.
- 11 non-residential Conditionally Exempt Small Quantity Generators (CESQG'S) and an additional 22 appointments for businesses brought in universal wastes such as fluorescent tubes.
- There was a total of 40,675 pounds of solids, and 4,675 gallons of liquid hazardous and universal wastes diverted from the waste stream in 2021.



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 22,000 customers were assisted in 2021 with information about recycling, composting, trash disposal, household hazardous waste, and waste reduction programs.

Highlights

- The Administrative staff handled 11,944 customer inquiries over the phone and completed 11,018 transactions at the front desk (sales of permits, trash disposal coupons and punch cards, and recycling and compost bins) for a total of 22,962 customers served. The front desk also distributed 221 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 659 online transactions in 2021, totaling \$80,766.76.
- Administrative staff assisted customers with navigating the RecycleTompkins.org website and using the Recycling and Solid Waste Center.

Program Highlights

Disposal

In 2021, Tompkins County transported 16,554 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.
- Identify and report illegal disposal violations in the County.

Highlights

- The Department continued to cull recyclables from commercial trash, diverting 54 tons from the landfill through recycling.
- The County issued 26 hauler licenses and 114 vehicle licenses in 2020. 47 County Code cases were investigated: 46 for illegal dumping, 1 for trash tag violation.



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

2021 Organizational Chart



Total Staff: 13

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.