



Recycling and Waste Management

Update to 2015 Evaluation Report

March 2016

Problems Identified

- **Incentives Misaligned.** Minnesota statutes established a “waste management hierarchy,” which prioritized waste reduction, reuse, and recycling above landfill disposal. Yet, landfill disposal was often the cheapest waste-disposal option.
- **Flawed Measurement System.** The 2014 Legislature increased recycling goals for metropolitan-area counties. However, progress toward these goals could not be reliably measured. Use of estimates, inconsistent reporting, and missing data made it difficult to determine accurate county or statewide recycling rates. Further, the Legislature had not established similar goals for other activities on the state’s waste management hierarchy.
- **Few Resources for Market Development.** The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) devoted just one staff person to developing markets for recycled materials. As a result, the agency has been reacting to immediate needs—such as the sudden closure of a mixed-glass processing facility—rather than proactively developing new material markets.
- **Ineffective State Recycling Practices.** Recycling opportunities in many state buildings—including many in the Capitol Complex—did not incorporate effective practices.

Changes Implemented

- **Improved Measurement System.** MPCA worked to improve the quality of solid waste data by moving away from county-based reporting. Instead, the agency started collecting data directly from waste haulers and processing facilities, which yield more reliable information about waste disposal at various levels of the hierarchy.
- **Small Increase in Market Development Staffing.** MPCA added a second, part-time staff person to assist with market development efforts. In its *2015 Solid Waste Policy Report*, the agency makes additional recommendations for strengthening the program in the future.
- **Improved State Agency Recycling.** MPCA and the Department of Administration worked to improve recycling contracts and upgrade recycling bins for the Capitol Complex.

Action Needed

- **Align Incentives with Preferred Waste Disposal Methods.** The Legislature should enact policies that promote activities at the top of the waste management hierarchy—reduction, reuse, and recycling—and discourage less preferred methods, such as landfill disposal.
- **Establish Goals at All Levels of the Waste Management Hierarchy.** The Legislature should establish goals for waste management activities other than recycling—such as landfill disposal—and require counties and MPCA to track progress toward these goals.