



State of New Hampshire

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To: Committee to Study Recycling Streams and Solid Waste Management
From: Amy Farnum, State Recycling Coordinator
Date: October 28, 2019
Re: Recycling Challenges

Overview

The state recycling program faces similar challenges as currently seen at the municipal level. Those state challenges were presented to the Committee on September 28, 2019 and will be summarized here within. Also shared during testimony was the history for RSA 9-C (State Government Waste Reduction, Recycling, and Recycled Products Purchase), focuses of the state's recycling program, and perceived needs for addressing challenges.
<http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/rsa/html/NHTOC/NHTOC-I-9-C.htm>

Historical Synopsis

In 2009, RSA 9-C was enacted to support best practice in waste stream management by New Hampshire State agencies. The statute encompasses four basic tenets in the realm of [sustainable materials management](#) for waste streams: Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, Reclaim. Materials processed while conducting New Hampshire's governmental business carry certain financial and environmental costs relating to waste disposal. Chapter 9-C indicates that an obligation exists to put into practice as part of state agency operations strategies to minimize these costs.

The R4 Program

New Hampshire's R4 Program (reduce, reuse, recycle, reclaim) delivers waste stream advice, guidance and support to state agencies. R4 strives to assist agencies in efforts to increase efficiency and effectiveness in sustainable materials management (SMM). The SMM concept represents "a systemic approach to using and reusing materials more productively over their entire life cycles" (source: EPA) for economic, social, and environmental benefits. Examples of R4 programs include outreach and education for "recycling right," consultation for agency "4R" initiatives, helping with waste audits to identify opportunities for shifting materials in the solid waste stream to reuse or recycling, and development of a "how to" guide to [sustainable procurement](#) for state agents; sustainable procurement is a key leverage point for shifting markets towards recycled content products and environmentally responsible products and services. The R4 Program mission is: *To provide customer-centered support to New Hampshire's state agencies for reducing materials sent to landfill, reusing assets, recycling resources, and reclaiming materials through procurement of recycled content products.*

Key Challenges for the Recycling Industry

Testimony given by stakeholders during committee meetings reinforced challenges felt by municipalities, states and businesses alike. First, it is extremely important that recycling is done “correctly” because costs for sorting and transportation rise when non-recyclable material flows into the recycling stream. Second, material may only be considered recyclable if end markets exist to use it as input in production of new goods. Third, recycled materials must be available to producers when and where needed for manufacturing, and movement of recyclables depends upon regional infrastructure to process that material and produce recycled content goods. Fourth, recyclables as raw material inputs to production must compete with virgin raw materials in pricing. Fifth, the value of recycled material commodities as a source of revenue in the marketplace is dictated strongly by supply and demand. With “China’s National Sword” the market is currently flooded and capacity development for recycled content production is more critical than ever. Sixth, recycling and use of recyclables in production is driven by consumer behavior and purchasing habits.

Challenges for the R4 Program

State agency recycling faces frequent and complex issues for contamination management because of the flow of material from many offices to centralized locations within buildings, and then into large dumpsters versus small curbside totes. Education and outreach must be constant to ensure policies are being followed and to manage a large network of persons overseeing the recycling systems on-site. The process is time consuming and beyond the availability of dedicated resources.

RSA 9-C calls for waste reduction strategies by state agencies with the support of DAS, but recycling is centralized and solid waste is decentralized. Having insight into just one side of the system, the identification of recycling and waste reduction opportunities relies heavily upon proactive outreach to the R4 unit by agencies. Insight for what is put in recycling and what goes to trash is low given the split in oversight. The volume and costs of solid waste disposal lend general awareness for potential waste reduction goals for the state, but gaps exist in detail..

Addressing Challenges

From an industry perspective, the dialogue locally, regionally and nationally for recycling and solid waste issues revolves around movement to “closed-loop systems” and developing “circular economies” whereby the recyclables return to production more readily. Additionally, facility and transportation infrastructure must be present in regional hubs for processing and manufacturing access. RSA 9-C captures this perspective for sustainable materials management within the government operations, but it is a complex system. Each branch of reduce, reuse, recycle and reclaim program development requires sufficient time and staffing resources to target goals and objectives and work towards statewide implementation. Overall strategies for strengthening recycling in New Hampshire are put forth with detail in the Northeast Recycling Council report dated October 7, 2019. Important sustainable material management leverage points are:

- **Grow end markets for recyclables in projects and products locally**
- **Encourage movement of recycling processors to the region/state**
- **Educate citizens regarding “better” buying behavior**
- **Consider options for producer responsibility in products and packaging**
- **Strengthen sustainable procurement knowledge and options**