

# Climate Smart Communities



## **Monroe County PE5: Waste Reduction Education Campaign**

Since 2018, the United States has seen the most significant changes in the past quarter-century to recycling. Monroe County's 30-year history with recycling has demonstrated the integral role of education in a successful program, and these longstanding and proactive education efforts would get the chance to shine amidst the chaos.

Monroe County has a long history of Solid Waste operations, beginning in the 1970s with the siting of a Greenfield Site landfill and investment in a state of the art refuse derived fuel plant. With one of the oldest curbside recycling programs in the state, the opening of Monroe County's Materials Recovery Facility in 1992 propelled the residential recycling program into the thriving program it is today under the leadership of County Executive Adam Bello.

The County's current solid waste management system provides a comprehensive array of facilities for use by residents, businesses and institutions. The facilities work symbiotically to manage materials in a way that economically and environmentally benefit each other, forming a true integrated system. As a testament to the success of comprehensive solid waste planning, facilitated by collaborations with private and municipal partners, the County has achieved a 42% diversion rate all while maintaining safe, compliant, and fiscally responsible operations.

Monroe County's Local Solid Waste Management Plan (LSWMP) identifies the path to pursue for management of solid waste generated in the County during a 10 year planning period (2015 to 2025). The development of the LSWMP included a public input process and approval from the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC). The LSWMP provides:

- An educational tool for planning unit members
- A countywide framework for the coordination of solid waste management
- A mechanism to establish countywide goals and objectives including recovery and waste reduction
- A plan to monitor progress towards goals

The County's LSWMP recognizes that local municipalities, the NYSDEC, private waste collectors, and private facility owners all play important roles in the current and future management of solid waste and recycling within the County.

In accordance with the NYSDEC, the LSWMP considers and addresses all components of the solid waste hierarchy beginning with the priority of reducing the amount of solid waste generated, followed by reuse and recycling, then recovery of energy from waste, and finally disposal.

The County has identified program strategies to work toward that are consistent with the State solid waste management policy, as set forth in Beyond Waste. The strategies set forth below were identified with the goal of further enhancing the reuse and recycling of materials generated in the County and reduce the quantity of materials requiring disposal at a landfill.

- Program Strategy #1: Continue Landfilling as Primary Disposal for all Non-Recyclable/Recoverable Waste
- Program Strategy #2 – Solid Waste Reuse and Recycling Law Revision
- Program Strategy #3 – Increase Recycling at County Facilities
- Program Strategy #4 – Construction & Demolition Debris Recycling
- Program Strategy #5 – Product Reuse Collection and Distribution Programs
- Program Strategy #6 – Support Yard Waste Management Efforts
- Program Strategy #7 – Organics Diversion Programs
- Program Strategy #8 – Monitor Management of Animal Mortalities
- Program Strategy #9 – Public Outreach and Education
- Program Strategy #10 – Local Flow Control Law, if Needed

- Program Strategy #11 – Product Stewardship Framework
- Program Strategy #12 – Pay-As-You Throw Program
- Program Strategy #13 – Improving Solid Waste and Recycling Data Compilation
- Program Strategy #14 – Generate a LSWMP Consistency Review Protocol

Monroe County is diligently working through each of the 14 program strategies as described in the bi-annual compliance reports to the NYSDEC completed in 2016, 2018 and 2021. This plan sets the stage for the way in which the County’s solid waste facilities operate, interact, and progress - always with the goal of diverting materials from the landfill and prioritizing waste reduction, reuse and then recycling. The County’s plans and goals have translated to on the ground action, resulting in a long term trend of decreasing waste generation.

While the contamination rate at the Monroe County Recycling Center (MCRC) had been notably low even in a single-stream system (under 10%) the trend of increasing contamination (Waste Management’s national rate in 2013 was 16%, rising to 25% in 2018), combined with the state of global markets throughout 2018, brought into focus the need to pre-emptively address contamination at the local level.

Monroe County’s multipronged education campaign called **Refresh Recycling!**, which began in 2018 in response to the global National Sword crisis and is ongoing today, included a magnet with information on curbside recycling and the ecopark, outreach through local schools and social media, as well as a partnership with the Rochester Americans hockey team.

The Solid Waste team worked with a nationally known illustrator to develop recycling signage and had 120 common recycling and trash items depicted. Having this visual communication resource at the ready was perfect timing for the larger conversation playing out in mainstream media about China’s impact on recycling markets, tightening contamination standards, and changes to recycling programs to maintain sustainability.

The illustrations were so well regarded throughout New York State that Monroe County licensed their use to the New York State Center for Sustainable Materials Management. This organization is responsible for the development of the Recycle Right New York project, providing statewide consistency and resources for recycling messaging to all municipalities.



Using feedback from the MCRC plant manager about the top contaminants at the recycling center, a graphic for the ecopark’s Facebook page (above) was created using the recently developed illustrations to demonstrate the “Dirty Dozen,” the top problem causing items at the MCRC. *This post received a record response and engagement rate, reaching 36,545 people, generating 547 likes, 490 comments, and 416 shares.*

The education team had also worked diligently to create virtual tour videos of the MCRC and the ecopark (<https://www.monroecounty.gov/ecopark/video-ecopark.php>) to give more residents the opportunity to see the inner workings of these facilities. The creation of these videos was an extensive process requiring script development, video shoots in multiple locations, and narration.

The MCRC video (<https://www2.monroecounty.gov/des-mcrc-video>) was the recipient of a national Bronze Telly Award, a video industry standard for outstanding production. As the team received media inquiries from TV, radio, and newspapers again and again about the state of recycling, having these resources at the ready enabled the team to better disseminate the message of recycling right and point the County's residents to the education resources they needed.

Monroe County's education resources also include the [Recycle Right Sign Suite](#) (downloaded by over 1,500 residents. images attached), an electronic newsletter (distributed to 15,000+ residents monthly), printed resource cards and magnets, 5,000+ distributed annually), and the [MCRC](#) and [ecopark tour](#) videos (nearly 16,000 views to date).

The outcome of these years of educational efforts throughout the County is that the **contamination rate at the MCRC is approximately half the national average.**