

Recycling and Composting Rates

Recycling and composting are good for the climate, the environment, and municipal finances.



Each ton of recycling or waste reduction saves municipalities \$60 - \$80 in disposal costs and can reduce greenhouse gas emissions by the equivalent of 500 pounds of carbon. Composted leaves, grass clippings, and food scraps creates rich fertilizers for public parks, community gardens, and homeowners. The economics of recycling will become more compelling as the market for recycled materials increases and as more landfills reach capacity.

The Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection has set a goal of recycling or composting 56% of the waste stream (including municipal residential solid waste, commercial waste, and construction debris) by 2010. As of 2006, MAPC residents produced 1.7 million tons of municipal solid waste. Only 26% of this waste was recycled or composted, on par with the state average of 25.5%. Two thirds of the region's cities and towns diverted less than 25% of their waste to recycling or compost. Only four municipalities had a recycling/composting rate higher than 50%.

Cities and towns can encourage recycling by adopting a Pay-As-You-Throw (PAYT) system for solid waste disposal. By charging residents a nominal fee per barrel or bag, PAYT programs relieve municipal budgets and create incentives for recycling and waste reduction. As a result, MAPC municipalities with PAYT programs had an average recycling rate of 42% in 2006, compared to 28% in municipalities that did not. These positive effects accrue whether the municipality provides curbside pickup or if residents must drop off their waste at a transfer station. The lowest recycling rates are found in those municipalities with free curbside pickup, where the average rate is only 26%.

