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Beyond Recycling: Zero Waste ... or darn close

Why do they call it municipal waste, anyhow?

Recycling is a daily habit for millions of people and thousands of communities across America. In no small measure, recycling's success results from the continued commitment of residents, professionals, taxpayers and officials acting together at the *local level*.

But despite recycling's success, our industries are making more disposable products and excess packaging than ever and using too many toxic materials. Three-quarters of the materials we discard at the curb are products, but when did municipalities and their local taxpayers have any control over the design, manufacture and marketing choices of products we buy?

Our current industrial system is based on a one-way flow of materials, using resources to make short-lived products that are destroyed in landfills or incinerators, forever losing the value of the material.

Communities are not recovering everything that could be recovered through recycling, and it is not entirely their fault. Even if municipalities and their residents were recycling everything they could, it would not be enough to stop threats to public health and destruction of our environment.

What is **Zero Waste**?

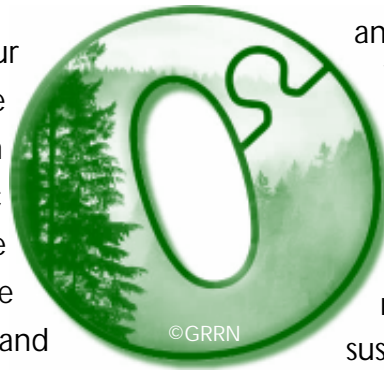
Our society's consumption and use of products is inevitable. But it is not inevitable that these activities result in mountains of waste or environmental problems. Waste is a result of poor product design, inefficient markets, and the failure to recognize discards as resources.

Zero Waste seeks to redesign the way resources and materials flow through our society. Zero Waste looks up-stream to reduce waste by limiting resource extraction and improving product design. Zero Waste offers a positive alternative to how we currently use our resources. Zero Waste gradually replaces landfills and incinerators with sustainable enterprises that create local jobs and local economic development.

Zero Waste: From managing waste to managing resources

Communities can pursue Zero Waste by first setting a goal of eliminating rather than managing waste. The creative collaboration of the community, its leaders, and policy makers can transform a system of liabilities (waste) into assets (resources) that yield local economic benefit.

Zero Waste communities require incentives, policies, and infrastructures that favor maximum recovery of discarded materials. Government intervention is needed, not to manage waste, but to change the rules and level the playing field.



The Road to Zero

Key Elements of Zero Waste

Support Community Recovery Systems
Create Jobs and Sustainable Communities
Producers Take Responsibility
End Subsidies for Waste
Redesign Products

Barriers to Zero Waste

Government Subsidies Favor Waste and Extraction
The High Cost of Waste is Hidden
Producers Ignore Responsibility for Products'
Environmental and Social Costs
Inertia of Existing Viewpoints and Practices

Model Zero Waste Resolution

WHEREAS

- The placement of materials in waste disposal facilities, such as landfills and incinerators, causes damage to human health, wastes natural resources and/or wrongly transfers liabilities to future generations, and
- Taxpayers and consumers are currently forced to assume the high financial cost of collecting, recycling, and disposing of materials, and
- The elimination of specified types of waste for disposal, also known as disposal bans, will protect states from waste importation from other states and nations, and
- Tax subsidies for waste and virgin materials send the wrong economic signals to both consumers and producers, and
- A resource recovery-based economy will create and sustain more productive and meaningful jobs, and
- Increasingly, U.S. and international governments and organizations are adopting the policy that the financial responsibility of collecting, recycling, and disposing of materials belongs with producers, and

- Producers should design products to ensure that they can be safely recycled back into the marketplace or nature, and
- Government is ultimately responsible for establishing criteria needed to eliminate waste, so that manufacturers produce and businesses sell materials that can be safely recycled or composted,

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT

- [City/ County/ Organization] supports the creation of a Zero Waste Plan in order to eliminate waste and pollution in the manufacture, use, storage, and recycling of materials.
[Optional]
- [City/ County/ Organization] confirms commitment to a target of zero waste by 2015, with a review in 2010.
- Furthermore, [City/ County/ Organization] is committed to full and open community consultation and ownership of a zero waste strategy involving community, Council and business sector partnerships.

Advocating Zero Waste: *GrassRoots Recycling Network*

The GrassRoots Recycling Network is a North American network of recycling professionals and waste reduction activists promoting [Zero Waste](#). GRRN is ready to help your community get on the road to Zero Waste... or darn close. GRRN works with communities and businesses across the country to encourage adoption of [Zero Waste Resolutions](#) and development of [Zero Waste Plans](#). GRRN believes that producer responsibility and Zero Waste will happen because local communities and their citizens can make it happen.

For more information, visit www.grrn.org/localgov/

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