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Wisconsin Uses Ordinances and Permits to Promote Recycling in Public Places

Wisconsin's Solid Waste Reduction, Recovery, and Recycling Law requires everyone in the state to recycle, whether at home, at work, or at away-from-home settings like fairs, festivals, sports events, conferences, and meetings. Every Wisconsin community has a recycling ordinance with language similar to that of the state law. The State of Wisconsin, and two of its communities in particular—the City of Madison and Waukesha County—are using regulations and ordinances in conjunction with public outreach and education as tools to enhance their public place recycling programs.

Photo: Chris Beimborn, Wisconsin Be SMART Coalition



This roll-off dumpster is filled with plastic and aluminum beverage containers collected during an event hosted by the Harley Owners Group at the Washington County Fair Park in southeast Wisconsin.

State of Wisconsin Program Overview

Fairs, festivals, and special events are a matter of state pride in Wisconsin. To make them more environmentally friendly and respond to a growing interest from citizens to recycle outside the home, in 2005, the state revised its recycling rules to clarify the original intent and scope of state recycling. This included specifying that “special events” are included in the definition of a “nonresidential” location. State officials see recycling in public places as a way to increase recycling rates and reinforce the message that recycling should be part of everyday culture.

Recycling Law. Passed in 1990, the Wisconsin recycling law requires local governments to develop and implement recycling programs for 14 materials now banned from municipal landfills and incinerators, including corrugated cardboard, glass bottles and



Wisconsin Recycles...

Wisconsin's recycling law requires coordinators of special events to make provisions for recycling the following items:

- Glass bottles and jars
- Aluminum and tin cans
- Plastic containers (#1 and #2)
- Newspaper
- Corrugated cardboard
- Office paper
- Other items, depending on the community

jars, aluminum cans, and plastic food and beverage containers (#1 and #2). The law also requires establishing local ordinances and educating all residents, businesses, government agencies, and institutions about recycling.

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) shares responsibility for enforcement with local governments. Communities are responsible for having ordinances and enforcing compliance. Event or facility owners are responsible for staffing and operating the recycling programs. While DNR emphasizes voluntary compliance through education and technical assistance, the department has the authority to issue citations to those who violate the law.

Administrative Rule Supports Recycling in Public Places. Despite the law's overall effectiveness, state officials learned that in some cases recycling responsibilities at special events were unclear. The revised rule remedies the situation by requiring commercial, retail, industrial, institutional, and government facilities and properties to recycle at special events such as fairs, festivals, sporting venues, conferences, and exhibitions. This small but powerful change gives local recycling officials and citizens interested in being able to recycle away from home a firm

“It was very powerful to clarify the definition of nonresidential facilities and properties in our recycling administrative code. We made it clear that recycling is required by everyone, everywhere in Wisconsin.”

*Cynthia Moore,
State of Wisconsin's Recycling Program Coordinator*

foundation from which to seek funding or other resources from their community boards for recycling in public places.

Education and Outreach. The state spearheaded development of tools to help citizens and organizations implement effective waste reduction and recycling programs at special events. The upshot: a Web-based toolkit developed by a coalition of municipalities and other partners that walks users through the process of setting up recycling programs at their events. The toolkit offers practical advice about the kinds of bins to use, when to empty them, and storage requirements for collected recyclables.

In addition, the state is building support for recycling in public places by working with local governments, attending conferences, and publishing a newsletter that highlights successful recycling programs at special events. State officials believe their efforts are working because they now observe more businesses implementing recycling. For example, local groups, such as the Sierra Club and various neighborhood associations like Madison Recycling Away from Home (RAH), are initiating recycling campaigns. Some fairs and festivals are composting as well.



Photo: Chris Beimborn, Wisconsin Be SMART Coalition

Some events, such as the Midwest Renewable Energy and Sustainable Living Fair, not only recycle but also collect food scraps and biodegradable food service ware for composting, as shown here.

City of Madison Program Overview

In September 2007, the City of Madison's Common Council passed a new recycling ordinance that requires event organizers to have an approved recycling plan in order to receive a permit to hold the event. "Basically, the ordinance codifies what we were already doing and ensures that all events will operate on a level playing field," explains George P. Dreckmann, recycling coordinator for Madison. A detailed brochure that event organizers receive when they apply for a permit outlines the ordinance's requirements and highlights how the city's recycling office can assist event coordinators.

Recycling Plan. The ordinance requires that event coordinators develop a recycling plan and have it approved by the city's recycling coordinator in order to receive a permit to hold the event. The plan must describe the recyclables the event will generate, how they will be collected from the public and vendors, and arrangements for transporting the materials to a recycling facility. Since 2005, the recycling office has been reviewing recycling plans on a case-by-case basis, and Dreckmann describes the task as "simple and straightforward." Because the city picks up the recyclables from most events, the city retains the weight slips from those events for which it serves as the hauler.

Enforcement. The ordinance does not authorize fines. Rather, it states that if the recycling coordinator disapproves a recycling plan, he or she will work with the organization to develop an approvable plan.

Container Loan Program. Madison's recycling office currently owns 110 collapsible bins that are available for loan and plans to add another 50 to accommodate an increased demand now that recycling is mandatory for all events. If event organizers plan to use the city to haul away their recyclables, they also receive 35-gallon clear plastic bags to collect their recyclables. On the other hand, if organizers use a private hauler, they can borrow the recycling bins, but need to supply their own plastic bags. The containers cost the city \$50 each to purchase, and the recycling office stores them in a nearby building. Event coordinators pay the replacement cost for any containers they fail to return.

Establishing a Track Record. Before making recycling at events mandatory, Dreckmann advises first establishing a track record by trying a few pilot projects so people can see that it works. "That way you can work out any kinks and learn from your mistakes," he says. In Madison's case, the city ran pilot recycling projects during the "Concert on the Square" musical series, which draws 15,000 to 20,000 people on a weekday evening, and "Taste of Madison," which draws 150,000 people during a weekend.

During the pilot phase, the recycling office's biggest challenge was finding the right container. During the concert series, the city used existing 55-gallon trash receptacles provided by the park service and recycling bins that were a different color, but experienced a high rate of contamination (mixing of wastes with the recyclables). At another event, a



Photo: Paul Abramson, Madison RAH

In between events, Madison RAH stacks and stores 40 recycling bins on loan from the City of Madison.

street festival, city officials tried using 95-gallon totes that they purchased when the city began offering single stream recycling at the curb in 2004. Although these containers worked well at some events, they had several drawbacks. They were bulky and heavy, workers found it difficult to tell when they were full, and they tied up the city's recycling truck for half a day.

Then, in 2005, the recycling office hit the nail on the head when it purchased 50 collapsible recycling containers with clear plastic bags. The recycling office tried them out at several neighborhood festivals before using them at the large Taste of Madison event to collect bottles and cans. "Everyone loved them," says Dreckmann. In fact, the bins worked out so well that the recycling office purchased 60 more and now clusters them with 45-gallon trash containers in a 1:1 or 2:1 ratio, depending on the size of the event.

Success Sells. With a few successful pilot projects under his belt, Dreckmann was better prepared to make a convincing case for recycling in public places. He found an ally in an alderman who served both on the solid waste advisory committee and the streets committee, which issues permits for special events. The alderman supported recycling in public places by attaching a rider to each event permit requiring inclusion of a recycling plan in order for the permit to be approved. From 2006 to 2007, the city required recycling plans for events on a permit-by-permit basis, but Dreckmann soon realized that it was important to codify this process in case the alderman on the streets committee was appointed to another committee.

To start the process, Dreckmann and the alderman met with a city attorney, who drafted the new language for the ordinance. Dreckmann then set out to gain support from various decision makers and event coordinators. Initially, he encountered resistance from some public works colleagues who reminded him of earlier failed attempts at offering recycling in public places in the 1990s. Others raised issues such as the potential for contamination of recycling bins and increased costs.

Dreckmann responded by pointing out how he had solved the container and contamination problem through the use of collapsible bins with clear plastic bags. Further, he argued that times have changed since the 1990s, and recycling is now more institutionalized. The dissenters quickly became supporters after learning how successful recycling had been at some of their events and that the City of Madison would provide recycling containers for free to event coordinators who gave the city their recyclables.



Photo: Chris Beimborn, Wisconsin Be SMART Coalition

Recycling bins come in many shapes and sizes. This one, in the shape of a plastic soda bottle, enabled visitors to recycle at an event for motorcycle enthusiasts.

“Show people that recycling at special events can work before you make it mandatory. That way you establish a track record and have time to work out the kinks of your program and learn from your mistakes. Above all, be flexible and patient—a successful program takes time.”

George P. Dreckmann,
City of Madison's Recycling Coordinator

Waukesha County

Program Overview

Located in southeastern Wisconsin among rolling hills and abundant lakes, Waukesha County is home to numerous fairs and festivals. Even before the recent clarification of the state law, the county had been actively involved in recycling in public places as a member of Wisconsin's Be SMART (Save Money And Reduce Trash) Coalition and a participant in the coalition's pilot program for recycling at special events.

The Waukesha County recycling office promotes the online Be SMART materials to organizers of festivals and other special events in the county. Further, the county purchased 50 collapsible recycling bins (at a cost of \$50 each) with clear plastic bags and loans them free of charge to event planners. Users accept full responsibility for the bins and agree to pay the replacement cost for any bins damaged or not returned intact.

When not in use, the bins are stored in a shed near the county fairgrounds. Recycling staff members also encourage the 25 municipalities who issue event permits in the county to include recycling requirements as part of the permitting process.

Education and Outreach.

To better target festivals in the county, the recycling office joined Wisconsin's Council of Festivals Committees, Inc., to access the organization's membership directory and compile a list of local event coordinators. A recycling specialist then sends out a letter to event coordinators, as well as chamber of commerce members and park and recreation department staff.

The letter reminds these stakeholders that recycling at their events is required by law and can reduce trash hauling fees and demonstrate community responsibility. The letter also outlines the county's recycling container loan program and offers the recycling office's assistance in planning waste reduction and recycling efforts at events, which can include meeting with the event planning team.

To ensure the sustainability of the recycling program from year to year, the county recycling office developed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with one Boy Scout troop that regularly requested use of the recycling bins for fundraising efforts. Because the scout troop collected recyclables at multiple local events, the county decided to purchase 20 recycling containers exclusively for the troop, freeing up the county loaner bins for



This collapsible recycling bin was placed beside food vendors and picnic tables at the Maxwell Street Days Flea Market in Waukesha County to make it easy for visitors to drop off their recyclables when they were finished eating.

Photo: Meribeth Sullivan, Waukesha County

Rules at a Glance

The Wisconsin Solid Waste Reduction, Recovery, and Recycling Law of 1990 requires local governments to develop and implement a recycling program for 14 materials banned from landfills, including corrugated cardboard, glass bottles and jars, aluminum cans, and plastic food and beverage containers (#1 and #2). The law also requires establishing local ordinances to ensure that all residents, businesses, government agencies, and institutions recycle. <http://dnr.wi.gov/org/aw/wm/publications/aneupub/WA422.pdf>

Administrative Rule, Chapter NR 544 “Effective Recycling Programs,” revised in 2005, clearly states that recycling is required at all nonresidential facilities and properties, including those used for special events. (For the new definition of nonresidential facilities and properties, see NR544.03(21), Wisconsin Administrative Code). www.legis.state.wi.us/rsb/code/nr/nr544.pdf

An amendment to the **City of Madison’s Code of Ordinances** requires applicants to submit a recycling plan when they apply for a street use permit if their event will include beverage service or use of corrugated cardboard. www.epa.gov/epaoswer/osw/conserves/ontheho/documents/wis-ord.pdf

other events. The MOU states that if and when the scouts discontinue their recycling efforts the bins will be returned to the county. This win-win arrangement helps ensure the long-term viability of recycling at special events and enables the scouts to earn money by providing recycling and trash service for event organizers.

Challenges and Solutions

Challenge: State law requires recycling, but event organizers were unfamiliar with how to develop a recycling plan and coordinate collection and hauling during their events.

Solution: State officials provided a grant to the Wisconsin Be SMART Coalition to develop an online toolkit for recycling in public places. Coalition members also speak at conferences and work to educate local governments about recycling at special events. The recycling bin loan programs offered by the City of Madison and Waukesha County are major tools that help encourage event planners to recycle.

Challenge: Identifying funding to purchase recycling bins is a common challenge.

Solution: The Wisconsin Be SMART Coalition and its partners coordinated a cooperative purchase of recycling bins to reduce costs for each partner. These bins can then be shared among partner communities and used at special events. Other financing ideas include fundraising or encouraging associations, such as chambers of commerce, to purchase the bins and then loan them to their members.

More Information

For more information, visit EPA’s *Recycle on the Go* Web site at www.epa.gov/recycleonthego or contact:

Cynthia Moore, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, at (608) 267-7550 or cynthia.moore@wisconsin.gov

George Dreckmann, City of Madison, at (608) 267-2626 or GDreckmann@cityofmadison.com

Meribeth Sullivan, Waukesha County, at (262) 896-8317 or MSullivan@waukeshacounty.gov

Photo: Paul Abramson, Madison RAH



The tops of Madison’s recycling bins have three openings sized to accept beverage containers. The label “Plastic Bottles Aluminum Cans,” coupled with the recycling arrows and illustrations of cans and bottles, further reinforces the message.

The Bottom Line

Wisconsin state law requires recycling at special events. The City of Madison and Waukesha County find this fact crucial when they work with event organizers and distribute outreach materials.

If recycling is required at special events, it's important to give event organizers the tools they need to do it properly. Developing a toolkit or how-to guide is an important first step to help educate stakeholders and facilitate recycling in public places.

Having the right container is critical to success. Both the City of Madison and Waukesha County found that collapsible recycling bins with clear plastic bags work well at many types of events.

Creative financing options exist for purchasing bins. Ideas include cooperative purchasing, fundraising, and enlisting associations, such as chambers of commerce, to buy the bins and loan them to their members.



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www.epa.gov/recycleonthego

Tools at a Glance

Wisconsin Be SMART Coalition provides partner communities with informational resources and hands-on planning support for special events through crew trainings, meetings with key players, downloadable signs, press releases, and education materials. In addition, Be SMART and its northeast region partners coordinated a cooperative purchase of recycling bins, which will be shared among those communities for use at special events. www.besmart.org

The Public Place Recycling Toolkit

contains tips, tools, reports, and case studies derived from firsthand experiences of site coordinators, event planners, and municipal recycling coordinators. The toolkit can help event organizers design programs to tackle trash, reduce waste, recycle effectively, and keep public facilities clean. The toolkit is a product of Wisconsin's Be SMART Coalition.

<http://besmart.org/publicplacerecycling>

Handed out at an Earth Day festival in Milwaukee, this cup is imprinted with the message: "Please reuse this cup so we can continue to use this planet."



Photo: Chris Beimbom, Wisconsin Be SMART Coalition

Madison Recycling Away from Home (RAH) is a coalition of organizations, including neighborhood associations and the Sierra Club in Madison, that provides volunteers to help manage recycling at neighborhood events, informs vendors about how to purchase recyclable or biodegradable materials, and works with city and county offices to encourage comprehensive event recycling.

www.madisonrah.org

Waukesha County's **Event Recycling Bin Loan Program** offers an online form that enables event organizers to register to borrow the county's recycling bins.

www.waukeshacounty.gov/WorkArea/linkit.aspx?LinkIdentifier=ekfrm&ItemID=15188

The Web site for "Public Place Recycling—Fairs, Festivals, Special Events" describes Waukesha County's free recycling bin loaner program and provides other information about recycling in public places.

www.waukeshacounty.gov/page.aspx?SetupMetaId=11064&id=15140

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Recycle
on the GO

EPA is partnering with federal agencies, states, municipalities, and organizations to promote recycling in public places.

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