

Somerset County Goes Green!

History of Recycling Program

In the 1970s, the County saw many local groups leading the way towards recycling. In 1971, Bridgewater had its first “trash-in” where township residents would bring their recyclables to a central collection site. In 1972, the former Warren Recycling Center expanded into a tri-municipal “Super Center,” in cooperation with Watchung and Green Brook. Later that year, Bound Brook formed a citizens group called O.G.N.O. (Our Garbage Needs Organizing) that had monthly collections of newspaper, glass bottles and cans. Somerville, another longtime recycler, became the first municipality in New Jersey to mandate newspaper recycling in 1977.

Recycling efforts had existed piecemeal in a number of other Somerset County municipalities since the early 1970s. In June of 1985, the local unit of the Association for Retarded Citizens began providing curbside pickups of newspaper, glass bottles and aluminum beverage cans on a pilot basis in Bound Brook, in cooperation with the County. By December 1985, the Somerset County Board of Chosen Freeholders approved mandatory recycling for all 21 municipalities, effective September 1, 1986. In January 1988, the County assumed complete control of the recycling program.



In 1992, a new County-owned and -operated recycling processing facility opened. Over the years new materials were added to the recycling stream, including plastics, textiles, steel and bi-metal cans, junk mail, corrugated cardboard and dry-cell batteries.

The quantity of recyclable materials collected and processed by the County has increased tremendously since the program’s inception. In 1986, the collection yield was 234 tons; in 2007, collections totaled 33,715 tons.

The Recycling Center and Division of Solid Waste Management are part of the County Department of Public Works. In-house processing and curbside operations, as well as the first-Saturday-of-the-month recycling drop-off program, are handled at the Recycling Center on Polhemus Lane in Bridgewater. Related solid waste-disposal programs – including household hazardous waste days, used-tire collections and electronics recycling – are handled by the Division of Solid Waste Management along with planning and marketing of recyclable materials.



While recycling alone cannot solve New Jersey’s garbage problem, recycling programs are having a significant effect on reducing the volume of waste going to landfills.

The benefits of recycling include conserving natural resources, saving energy and protecting and preserving our clean air and water.

Recycling is not just an issue for residents. Businesses and institutions must recycle too. A [brochure](#), titled, “Recycling: A Guide for Somerset County Businesses, Institutions & Industries,” provides information about recycling and telephone numbers for municipal recycling coordinators.

[Recycling schedules](#) and free calendar stickers are provided to residents annually. A special “Talking Trash” publication is inserted in the Courier News every April to educate residents on subjects ranging from what and how to recycle, to how to start a compost pile and how to properly dispose of home-generated medical waste.