

2008 JLARC REPORT: WASTE REDUCTION EFFORTS IN VIRGINIA

FINDINGS

1. Virginia's statutory framework for waste management indicates that waste reduction is preferred over disposal in landfills or incineration. However, few resources are dedicated to waste reduction, and long-term waste reduction goals have not been identified. (Chapter 4)
2. Resources limit compliance with State laws and State assistance to localities in finding and developing recycling markets, and strong markets are necessary to help offset collection costs. Viable markets appear to enhance the effectiveness of State programs to recycle tires and lead-acid batteries. (Chapter 5)
3. State agencies and universities indicate they have recycling programs in place. However, there is little guidance for the programs, and source reduction or pollution prevention efforts are limited. (Chapter 6)
4. Localities use different methods and data sources to calculate their recycling rates. Greater verification of recycling data could make reported recycling rates more accurate and identify programs in need of improvement. (Chapter 7)
5. Most solid waste planning units (SWPUs) report meeting their mandated recycling rate, but a subset of SWPUs have struggled to do so. The performance of recycling programs is affected by population density, public education, and participation in regional partnerships. Generally, collection costs and limited markets make recycling more expensive for Virginia localities than disposal in landfills. However, in high population density areas, recycling and landfill disposal costs compare more favorably. (Chapters 3, 8)
6. Container deposit laws seem to be effective at reducing litter but may be less effective at increasing statewide recycling rates. Improper disposal of plastic bags may be having adverse effects on Virginia agriculture. Increased opportunities to recycle compact fluorescent light bulbs may mitigate concerns about the potential health effects of the mercury the bulbs contain. (Chapter 9)
7. Other states use non-general fund sources for waste reduction efforts. With additional resources, State-level coordination of waste reduction and public education activities could be enhanced, and market development could be expanded. Besides the currently-required minimum recycling rates for SWPUs, a statewide goal of lowering per capita waste disposal could be developed. (Chapter 10)

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Department of Environmental Quality should determine the funding needs of local recycling and litter prevention efforts and report the amounts needed to fully fund each to the General Assembly by the 2010 Session. The General Assembly may wish to consider creating a separate fund from which to provide grant funding for local recycling efforts. (Chapter 4, p. 48)

2. The Department of Education (DOE) should develop guidelines for public schools regarding recycling and waste reduction activities pursuant to §10.1-1425.9 of the *Code of Virginia*. In developing such guidelines, DOE should consult with school administrators and staff, Department of Environmental Quality staff, local recycling coordinators, the Virginia Recycling Association executive officers, and other stakeholders as necessary. (Chapter 5, p. 53)
3. The Department of Environmental Quality should assist the data collection efforts of the solid waste planning units by developing and making available a standard survey collection instrument for businesses and institutions. (Chapter 7, p. 87)
4. The Department of Environmental Quality should institute a formal review process of the recycling rate reports from each solid waste planning unit to ensure the accuracy of the reported information. The review process should permit the department to identify unusually high or low reported data and assess the credibility of that information. (Chapter 7, p. 91)
5. The Department of Environmental Quality should develop or make available an electronic reporting system for the local recycling rate reports that includes a process for identifying potential data discrepancies. (Chapter 7, p. 91)
6. The Department of Environmental Quality should use its recycling workshops to promote practices that have been successful at increasing waste reduction in Virginia and elsewhere. (Chapter 8, p.110)
7. The General Assembly may wish to consider levying a surcharge of \$0.25 to \$1.00 on the fees imposed by facilities permitted by the State to accept and dispose of municipal solid waste. The General Assembly may also wish to consider dedicating the revenue generated from such a surcharge to waste reduction efforts. (Chapter 10, p. 127)
8. Contingent upon the provision of additional funding dedicated to waste reduction efforts, the General Assembly may wish to consider using the revenue to fund (1) the creation of a State recycling coordinator position organized within the Department of Environmental Quality to assist State entity and local recycling programs and to develop markets for recyclables, (2) public education and outreach efforts to expand existing waste reduction programs and develop new programs, (3) an increase in funding available to solid waste planning units for waste reduction programs, and/or (4) grants that would be available to processors and end users of recyclables to increase the amount of recycling activity occurring in Virginia. With the establishment of a State recycling coordinator position, the General Assembly may wish to consider eliminating the Virginia Recycling Markets Development Council. (Chapter 10, p. 132)
9. The General Assembly may wish to direct the Department of Environmental Quality to (1) periodically examine the need to update the current minimum recycling requirements, (2) identify a waste reduction goal for Virginia that establishes a baseline amount of waste the State wishes to dispose of on a per capita basis, and (3) develop strategies that would be needed to implement such a goal. DEQ could report its finding to the General Assembly prior to the 2010 General Assembly Session. (Chapter 10, p. 137)