



## Businesses Are an Essential Partner in the Effort to Improve Recycling Rates in the Garden State

*NJ BUSINESS SOLUTIONS is a service to the members of the New Jersey Business & Industry Association and the readers of New Jersey Business magazine. These articles are intended to help New Jersey employers deal with practical issues affecting their business operations.*

**By Lisa P. Jackson, Commissioner, New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP)**

**T**wenty years ago, New Jersey set the standard as the first state in the nation to mandate statewide recycling. In 1987, the Mandatory Source Separation and Recycling Act established statewide recycling goals at 50 percent for municipal solid waste and 60 percent for total solid waste by 1996. New Jersey achieved these goals by the late 1990s, making the state a leader in recycling. Since then, however, recycling rates have steadily declined. While recycling tonnage has remained somewhat stable, waste generation rates have climbed steadily, reducing the percentage recycled.

DEP regularly tracks data on a variety of materials recycled, and recycling rates for office paper are particularly disappointing. A major source of office paper is the business community. If the state is to achieve its overall recycling goals and realize the environmental and economic benefits associated with recycling, we need everyone, including the business community, to do their part. We cannot afford to have anyone be complacent.

In an effort to examine and identify new ways to revitalize

recycling in New Jersey, DEP has brought together recycling stakeholders and formed working groups to focus on different sectors, including business. Out of the efforts of the business work group, the New Jersey Food Council and the DEP formed a committee to identify obstacles grocery stores encounter when recycling. In the future, we hope to hold more meetings like these in various sectors to help identify and address any obstacles businesses face in meeting recycling goals.

Additionally, the DEP has partnered with the Association of New Jersey Recyclers and the state and local chambers of commerce to host workshops around the state to assist small businesses in meeting their recycling responsibilities. DEP is currently developing a primer that outlines recycling requirements, best practices and case studies that can aid businesses in their recycling efforts.

It is in our collective best interest for everyone to increase recycling and accurately report recycling tonnage. Recycling saves energy, conserves natural resources, reduces emissions of air and water pollutants, offers industries an environmentally preferable



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source of raw materials, and decreases the need for landfills and municipal waste incinerators.

In 2004 alone, recycling in New Jersey saved more than 4.7 million tons of iron, coal and limestone, nearly 10 million trees, and an estimated 113 trillion BTUs of energy while reducing air and water pollutants by more than 129,000 metric tons. In addition, recycling had a positive effect on New Jersey's economy. Recycling has created more than 27,000 jobs and upward of 2,000 businesses with total receipts reaching \$5.9 billion annually. Recycling can also save individual businesses money by avoiding significant costs associated

with disposal of waste.

In addition, recycling promotes our state's greenhouse gas reduction goals. The recycling of paper, plastic, glass, aluminum cans and steel cans reduced greenhouse gas emissions by 2.9 million metric tons of carbon equivalents in 2004.

Despite reduced rates, New Jersey is still a nationally recognized leader in recycling, but by working together we can do even better. As we approach the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of New Jersey's recycling law next month (April 2007), we all should set our sights on significantly improving recycling rates. Only through hard work and a renewed commitment will New Jersey be able to achieve its recycling goals. I ask the New Jersey business community to "step up to the plate" and do its part to help the state meet its recycling goals once again. ♻