



Wisconsin Rest Area Recycling Program

In 1992, the Wisconsin Department of Transportation initiated an innovative rest area recycling program throughout the state in an effort to increase statewide recycling rates. Today, rest area visitors consistently provide positive feedback about the recycling services at rest areas. This successful program proves that if recycling is offered at rest areas, travelers take notice.

Facts-at-a-Glance

- Wisconsin has 32 rest areas and 83 waysides.
- More than 23 million people stop at Wisconsin rest areas and waysides each year.
- Visitors can recycle aluminum, plastic, glass, and newspaper at every rest area and cardboard and magazines at select rest areas.
- WisDOT contracts with the nonprofit Rehabilitation for Wisconsin for all rest area maintenance.

“Your recycle area is great. You may want to take pictures of the line-up and send them to other states—A+.”

- Visitor to Grant County ASW 106.



Program Overview

With more than 23 million people stopping at Wisconsin's 32 highway rest areas and 83 smaller waysides each year, Wisconsin's Department of Transportation (WisDOT) saw potential in establishing a recycling program for rest area visitors. The recycling program also would help WisDOT comply with the 50 percent waste diversion target required for all state agencies by the state's recycling law, Wisconsin's Act 335. In 1992, WisDOT implemented a pilot recycling program at a limited number of rest areas. Because recycling rates increased, WisDOT expanded the "Recycle Wisconsin" program in 1995 to include all interstate rest areas and all rest areas that receive more than 1,000 vehicles per day.



Photo courtesy of WisDOT

Johnson Creek rest area in Wisconsin showing a cluster of recycling bins.

Nuts and Bolts

WisDOT contracts with Rehabilitation for Wisconsin (RFW), a private nonprofit organization, for rest area maintenance. RFW manages the Community Rehabilitation Program (CRP), which provides day-to-day maintenance at each rest area and some waysides. Under RFW management, CRP crews sort the recyclables and deliver them to the local recycling center. WisDOT allows CRP to keep the proceeds from the recyclables as long as the revenue goes to programs to support CRP employees, which gives the community an incentive to maintain the recycling program.

WisDOT began the program by setting up a primary cluster of receptacles near the main building of each rest area. The cluster includes a trash can and a clearly labeled bin for each recycled material collected. Three additional receptacle clusters are placed near the curb in the parking area. Each participating rest area collects glass bottles, aluminum cans, plastic, and newspaper; select rest areas also collect corrugated cardboard and magazines.

Wisconsin's contract with RFW, whose work includes maintenance, custodial, trash disposal, landscaping, cleaning, and recycling duties, totaled \$5.5 million in 2001. The state does not separate recycling costs from its total rest area maintenance budget, nor does it record the revenue earned by CPR's efforts.

The Bottom Line

- Proceeds from selling the recyclables go towards CRP employee education.
- Rest area recycling provides a valued customer service.
- In 1998*, rest areas collected:
 - 20.7 tons of aluminum
 - 25.0 tons of plastic
 - 78.4 tons of glass
 - 16.5 tons of newspaper
- At today's market prices for these commodities, CRP could make \$38,000 to \$45,000 from these quantities.
- Increased public awareness and acceptance of the recycling program was evidenced by the decrease in contamination, which reduced the need for crews to separate trash from the recycling containers.

* WisDot stopped measuring the amount of materials recycled after 1998 because they had proven the program successful.

Reasons for Success

- WisDOT conducted a public education campaign that included: a press release announcing the program's inception, brochures available at rest areas, radio messages on the highway broadcast channel, and signs placed by trash and recycling bins.
- Increased signage helped decrease contamination.
- Receptacle doors on the recycling bins were locked to prevent aluminum can scavenging.
- After having trouble selling recyclables, CRP worked to identify markets. CRP recommends identifying markets before establishing a recycling program.
- Contracting with RFW and CRP involved the public and community, encouraging their participation.

Future Forecast

The success of the "Recycle Wisconsin" program illustrates the importance of recycling not only at home, but also when traveling and on the go. After 14 years of rest area recycling, Wisconsin's program is here to stay and shows that recycling at rest areas is both feasible and sustainable.



Photo courtesy of WisDOT
Sign directs travelers to recycle at Wisconsin rest area.



United States
Environmental Protection
Agency

Office of Solid Waste (5306P)
EPA 530-06-023
December 2006
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Recycle
on the **GO**

EPA is partnering with other federal agencies, states, municipalities, and organizations to promote recycling away from home.

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