Annual Report on the Status of Recycling in Delaware

Twenty-Fifth Edition

Presented to the Honorable Matt Meyer, Governor of Delaware and the 153rd Delaware General Assembly

November 2026

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Division of Waste and Hazardous Substances
Compliance and Permitting Section
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Executive Summary

The General Assembly enacted Delaware's Universal Recycling Law (UR Law) on June 8, 2010, and established ambitious waste diversion goals for the State. Waste diversion is defined as the amount of waste recycled and the amount of waste diverted from entering landfills through source reduction activities. The goals were to recycle 50% of the municipal solid waste (MSW) disposed of by calendar year 2015 and 60% by calendar year 2020. These goals included recyclables diverted from both residential and commercial waste and utilized EPA's guidelines for calculating the recycling percentage. The following report reflects what was accomplished during calendar year 2025 (CY2025).

The CY2025 recycling rate for Delaware was 35.9%

The State has been successful at diverting recyclable materials from the landfill, but the goals set forth in the UR Law have not been achieved yet. The State recycled 35.9% of its municipal solid waste in CY2025. Even though Delaware has not achieved the goals established in the legislation, a comprehensive statewide system has been developed to reduce the burden on our landfills and provide raw materials to the market through our diversion activities.

CY2025 Recycling Rate Summary in Tons

Diverted Recyclables	MSW Disposed	Total Municipal Solid Waste	Percent Diverted Recyclables
455,938	813,900	1,269,837	35.9%

For the full report visit: [Assessment of Municipal Solid Waste Recycling CY2025]

As illustrated in the charts below, Delaware has made significant strides in the diversion of waste to new uses and in the reduction in the amount of waste sent to Delaware's landfills since 2006. The CY2025 data shows the residential recycling amount increased by 13,474 tons, and the commercial recycling amount decreased by 10,033 tons when comparing CY2024 to CY2025. This resulted in the diversion rate

decreasing 0.5% from 2024 to 2025 (from 36.4% to 35.9%). The amount of waste landfilled increased by 23,100 tons (2.8%) from 2024. That is a result of an additional 2,580 tons of residential waste and 20,520 tons of commercial waste going to the landfill. The diversion rate is calculated only on those materials recycled from MSW sources using EPA's methodology. All other materials (such as construction and demolition waste, industrial waste, and land clearing debris) are excluded. Materials that are sent directly for energy recovery are also excluded (such as tires sent for tire-derived fuel). Most scrap metals except for appliances, lead-acid batteries, and aluminum cans are not counted as MSW. This results in a slightly lower recycling rate than what is achieved.

Figure 1 - Recycling Rates in Delaware

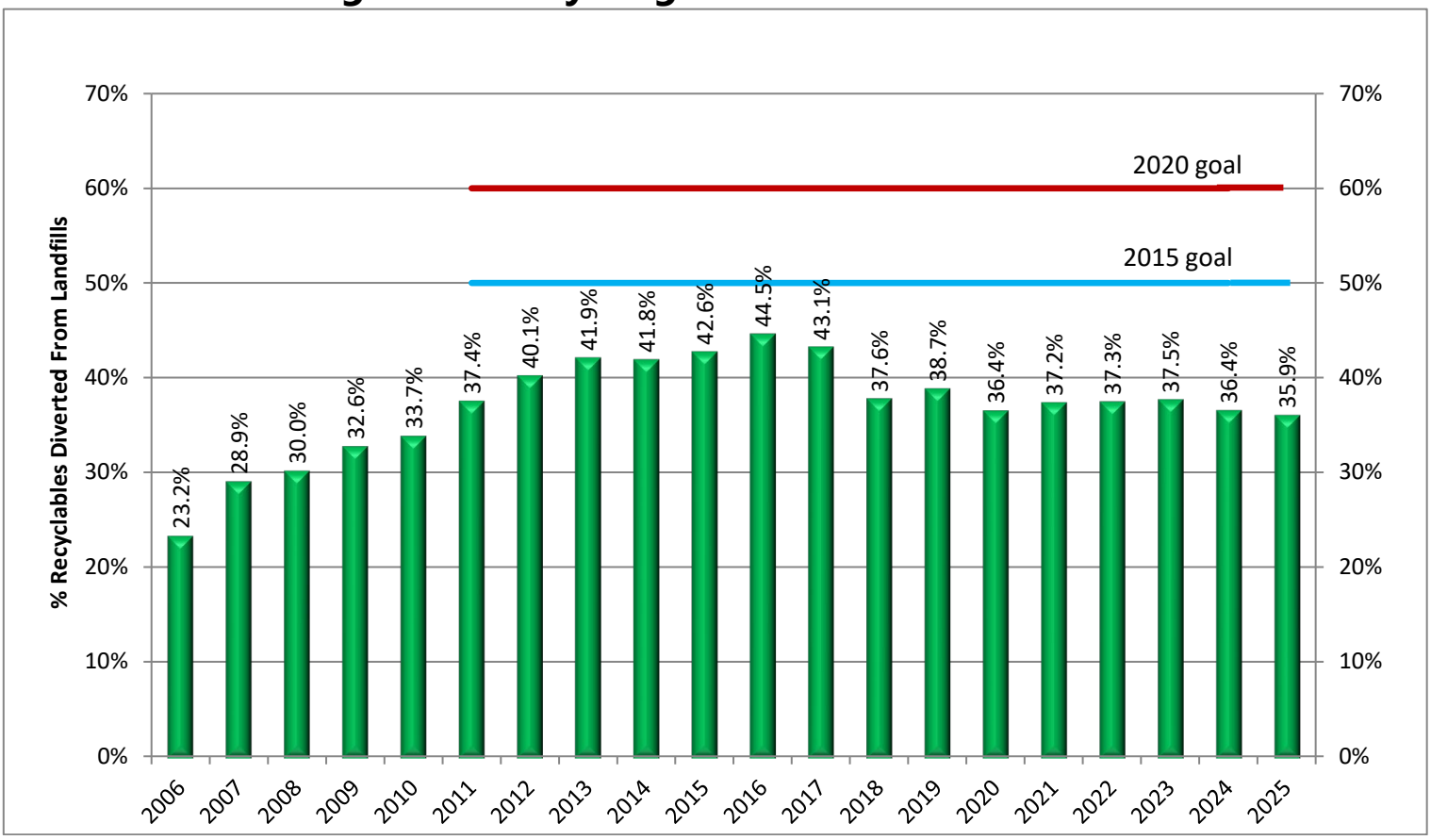
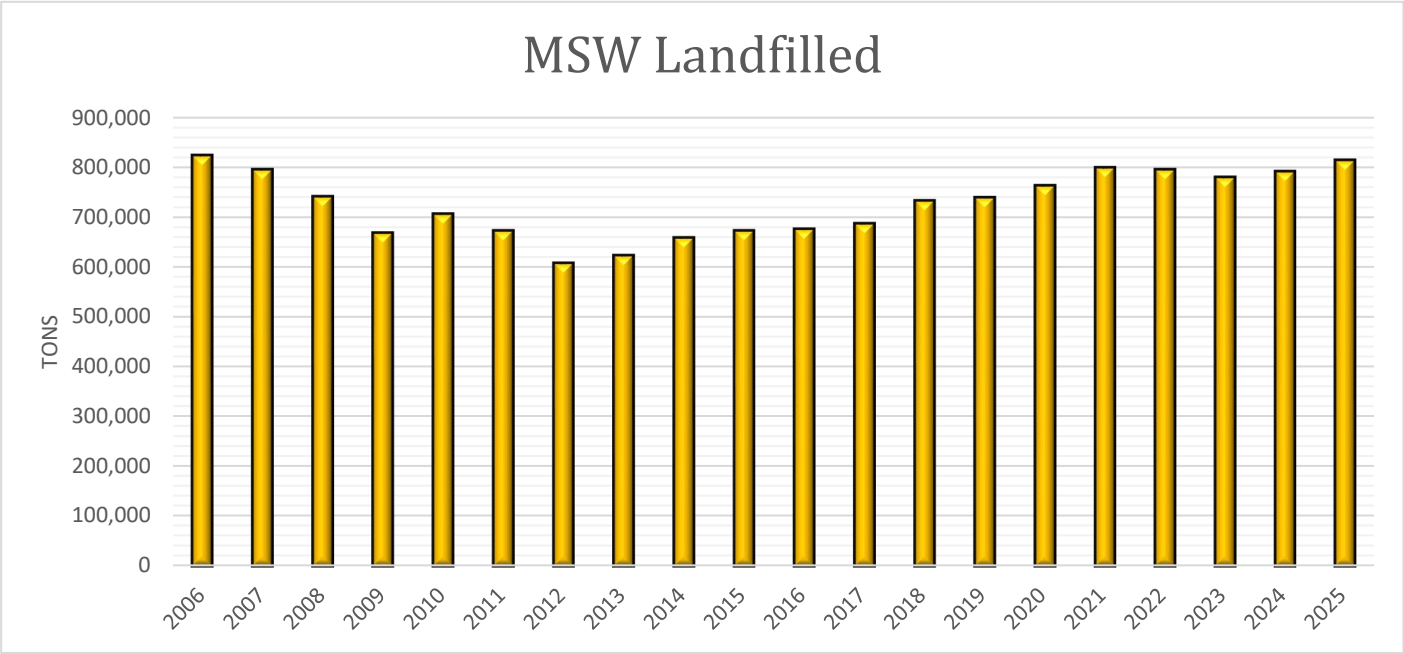
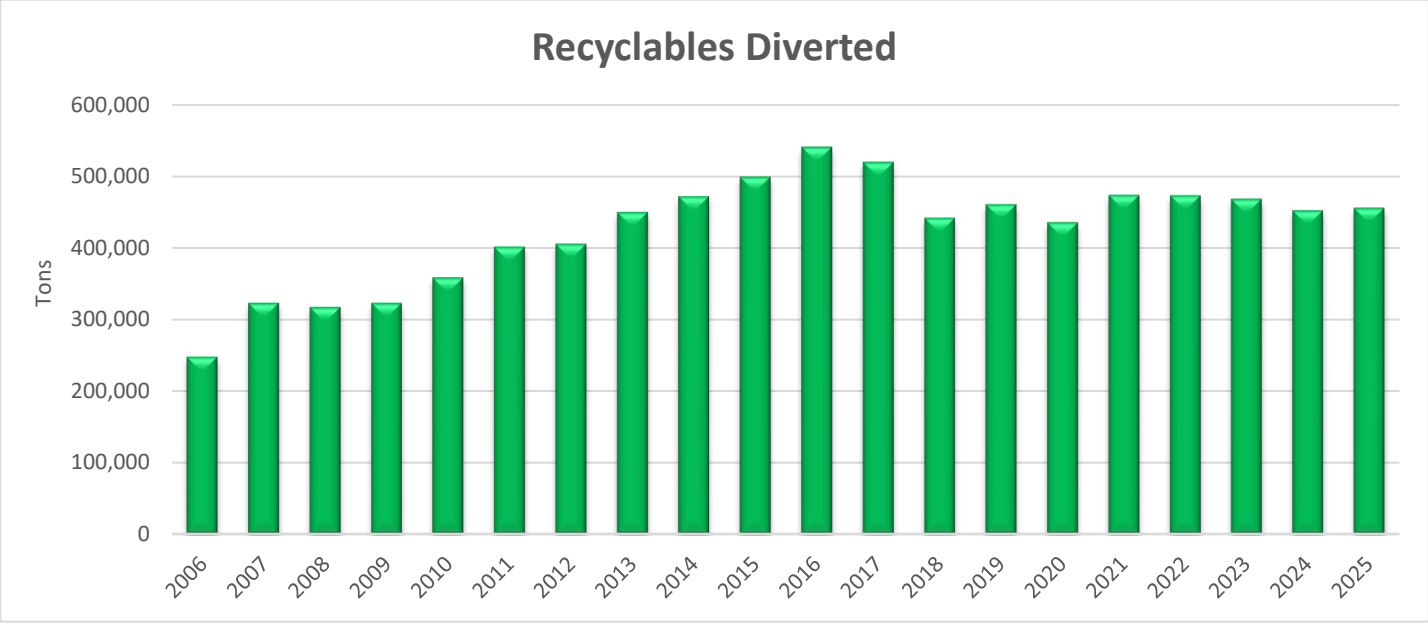


Figure 2 – Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) Landfilled in Delaware



14,545,042 tons of material have been landfilled since 2006.

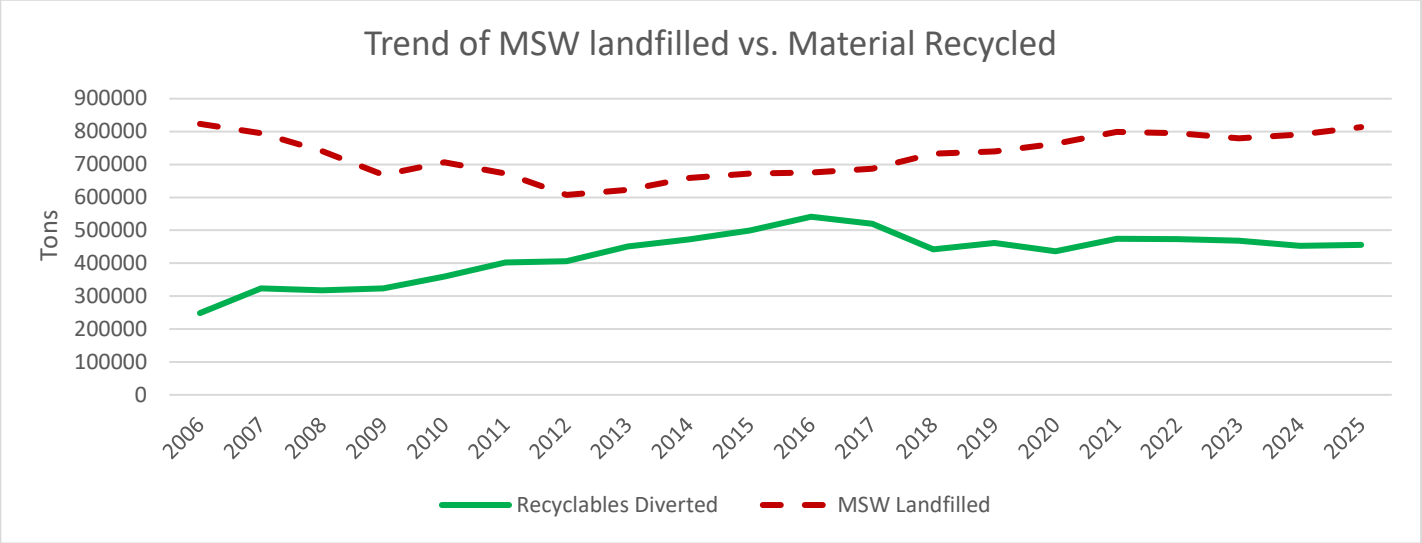
Figure 3 – Recyclables Diverted from Landfills in Delaware



8,527,448 tons of recyclables have been diverted from landfills since 2006.

Delaware has three municipal solid waste landfills. One in each County. Delaware also has one Materials Recovery Facility (MRF) where most residential recyclables go to be sorted and sold to manufacturers to be made into new items. This facility processes an average of 115,000 tons of recyclables per year. It is very important that only acceptable recyclable materials end up at the facility. However, there are often large amounts of trash sent to the MRF that contaminates the recyclable materials and makes them less marketable, and less valuable. Examples of contamination include food waste, trash, diapers, scrap metal, and plastic bags. Valuable time and energy is spent trying to remove as much of these contaminants as possible from the desired material. Outreach and education still need to continue so that all Delaware residents and businesses know what is acceptable to put in their recycling cart or recycling dumpster. Delaware is unique because there is one MRF that services the entire state. This allows one message to be sent to residents on what is acceptable to recycle whether they are at home, work, or school. However, the number of people moving and visiting from out of state where recycling processes are different, and the influence of national messaging creates some confusion.

Figure 4 – Trend of MSW landfilled vs. Recyclables diverted from the landfills



813,900 tons of MSW landfilled and 455,938 tons of recyclables diverted in 2025.

One of the challenges in achieving a reduction in MSW landfilled is that Delaware's population has steadily increased from ~859,000 in 2006 to ~1,059,952 in 2025. There was a 0.99% increase from 2024 to 2025. On average, each resident generated 6.6 pounds of trash per day in 2025 based on the total Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) produced divided by the population.

There was the equivalent of 6.6 pounds of trash generated per day by each Delaware resident in 2025.
Approximately 2.4 pounds of that were recycled.

One reason the diversion rate decreased in 2025 involved commercial waste. The amount of commercial waste landfilled in 2025 was 107,975 tons more than in 2016, but the amount of commercial waste diverted from the landfill in 2025 was 68,145 tons less than in 2016 when Delaware reached its highest diversion rate of 44.5%. Action needs to be taken to improve recycling in the commercial sector to stop the 13.4% decline in diversion since 2016. There has only been a 3.6% decline in residential diversion since 2016. A fire at the commercial recycling facility in April 2025 may have had an impact as the facility accepted over 15,000 tons less material than in 2024.

Other factors that led to the decreased diversion rate were a 9% decrease in paper packaging, and a 5% decrease in mixed recyclables diverted from the landfill when comparing 2024 to 2025.

Recommendations of the DNREC and DSWA to the Governor and General Assembly:

1. **Promote Legislation that reinforces waste reduction and increased recycling in Delaware so that the goals of the Universal Recycling Law can be achieved.**
    - Support businesses in Delaware that utilize reuse and repair services that help lessen the amount of waste being sent to our landfills.
    - Support businesses interested in diverting food waste and organic material from landfills.
    - Encourage the permission of backyard compost bins for organic waste that is often prohibited by HOA's.
    - Require reuse or donation of state assets through State Surplus program.
2. **Expand your own recycling knowledge and inform your constituency.**
    - Share Delaware's Recyclopedia search tool (de.gov/recyclopedia) as the best resource for knowing how to properly dispose of items (national messaging doesn't apply).
    - Encourage all State employees to take the training module about Recycling in Delaware on the Delaware Learning Center website.
    - Follow DNREC and DSWA on social media and share valuable content with constituents.
3. **Request a status update from the Government Support Services Division of the Office of Management and Budget regarding 7 Del. Admin Code §4106 Environmentally Preferable Purchasing Policy.**
    - Section 12.0 of the above referenced regulations discusses OMB creating a workgroup to coordinate, facilitate and make recommendations under these regulations regarding environmentally preferable procurement opportunities.
    - Requiring specified recycled content percentages in procurement purchases helps establish a market for recyclables being collected in the state.
4. **Request OMB work with DNREC to review recycling practices in State buildings.**
    - State office buildings are not exempt from the Universal Recycling Law and Regulations. There needs to be an annual review and assessment of State

office building participation in the program. This is to ensure containers and service contracts are optimized to maximize diversion from State office buildings. It will also help to identify and correct contamination issues which might be occurring due to incorrect recycling practices. This could potentially save the state money and increase the recycling rate.

5. **Continue to explore new technologies and outreach strategies that promote recycling in Delaware.**
    - This includes working collaboratively with DNREC, DSWA, and other public or private entities.
6. **Support DNREC accessing federal funds to reinstate the Universal Recycling Grant & Low Interest Loan Program.**
    - DNREC believes grants and loans to support recycling activities and businesses in our State is one of the most important steps in reaching the recycling goals set in the Universal Recycling Law. The Recycling Fund, which provided monies to support the Universal Recycling Grant and Low Interest Loan program, has been exhausted. The EPA has offered grant opportunities that DNREC has applied for to work on infrastructure needs for recycling in DE. These grants and loans will help to expand diversion and recycling efforts which can generate good paying local jobs, economic stimulation, and support climate change reduction efforts, leaving Delaware better for future generations.

Background

In September of 2000, former Governor Thomas Carper established the Delaware Recycling Public Advisory Council (RPAC) with Executive Order No. 82. On June 8, 2010, the General Assembly formally recognized RPAC when Delaware's Universal Recycling Law (UR Law) was enacted. Members of RPAC are volunteers appointed by the Governor. RPAC was tasked with offering advice to DNREC and the DSWA on all aspects of recycling, advise DNREC in developing criteria for the Recycling Grants Program and selection of application projects that are eligible to receive funding, providing recommendations on recycling outreach and education programs conducted by DNREC and DSWA, and submitting an annual status report to the Governor and General Assembly. RPAC held periodic meetings throughout the year to discuss opportunities to engage the public. The annual report continues to follow the EPA's measurement protocol methodology, established by the Council when it was created, so that it is comparable to other state and federal measures.

The 2010 UR Law created the single-stream curbside recycling program we have today and implemented a short-term beverage container fee that initially funded the Universal Recycling Grant and Low Interest Loan Program. The program awarded over 100 grants, totaling more than $8.4 million to increase recycling activity and decrease waste production in the State. The funding ended in December 2014 and unfortunately the remaining funds were reallocated in 2016 by the legislature. The remaining interest and unawarded funds were distributed by the final cycle of the Grant Program in 2019. The expenditures amounts can be viewed in previous reports.

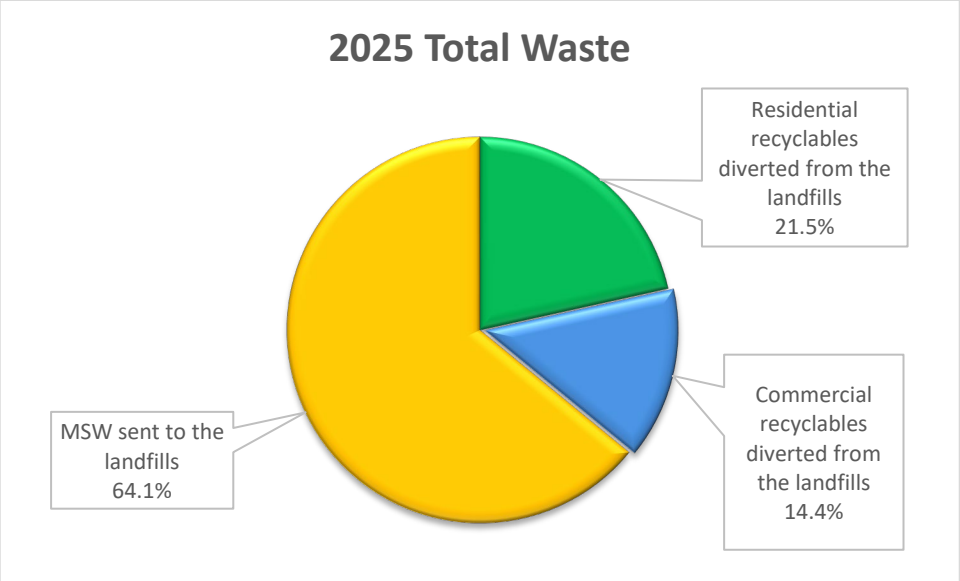
In August 2026, Governor Meyer signed Senate Bill 267. This bill amended sections of the Universal Recycling Law to provide some clarifications. It also eliminated the Recycling Public Advisory Council (RPAC) and the recycling grants and low-interest loan program. The Bill still requires DNREC and DSWA to generate an annual report and to convene periodic meetings to discuss the status of recycling activities in Delaware with the stakeholders of RPAC.

Measurement and Reporting

DNREC and DSWA utilize statistically acceptable and comparable methodology for measuring recycling diversion rates based upon EPA guidelines. This methodology

provides an objective and auditable approach to recycling measurement which is relevant and repeatable. DNREC has developed guidelines for the recycling industry to report information as directed by the Universal Recycling Law (7 Del. C., §6056). To help protect proprietary business information, DSM Environmental Services, Inc. consultant collects the recycling data, achieving better and more accurate results since 2011. 2025 is the fifteenth year of industry reporting. This data includes residential and commercial recycling information including yard waste. In CY2025 the residential recycling rate increased by 1.1% to 43.0% and the commercial recycling rate decreased 2.1% to 28.8% from the 2024 rates. For the full report visit: Assessment of Municipal Solid Waste Recycling CY2025. EPA's calculation for a national average recycling rate was 32.1% in 2018. In November of 2020, they also announced a national recycling goal of 50% by 2030.

Figure 5 – CY2025 Total Municipal Solid Waste Breakdown



Breakdown of 35.9% diverted recyclables into residential and commercial.

Recent Recycling Efforts in Delaware

DNREC Activities

Recycling Grants Program

The remaining balance of the Universal Recycling Grant and Low Interest Loan Program funding has been spent. The program is no longer available unless a new funding source is found. No funding was appropriated in the FY2026 budget, so the program will remain suspended until funding is allocated during an upcoming budget cycle.

Plastic Carryout Bag Ban and At-Store Recycling Program

The single-use plastic bag ban went into effect on January 1, 2021. At the time of implementation, the ban only applied to certain stores within the State and required a thicker "reusable" plastic film bag. An enhanced plastic bag ban went into effect on July 1, 2022, banning ALL retail stores (except restaurants) from utilizing any plastic film bags at checkout. Stores that provide exempt plastic bags are required to have an at-store drop off bin for plastic bags and plastic film wrap. This is the only way residents can recycle this type of material since it is not accepted by the single stream recycling program. When plastic bags and plastic film get to the Material Recovery Facility (MRF) it wraps around and jams the equipment at the sorting facility, causing significant issues. DNREC conducted 38 Plastic Carryout Bag Ban inspections in 2025 to enforce this legislation.

Organics Diversion

DNREC's Division of Waste & Hazardous Substances has agreed to a three-year contract with a vendor to conduct a pre-order Compost Bin and Rain Barrel sale that started in the spring of 2024. Backyard composting reduces the amount of food waste that needlessly ends up in Delaware's landfills. Food waste is one of the largest waste streams that end up in our landfills. Combining food waste with yard waste in a compost bin produces nutrient rich soil that can be used as a natural soil amendment on gardens, flower beds, or lawns. There were 197 compost bins and 171 rain barrels sold at the April 2025 event. There were 24 composters and 20 rain barrels sold at the November 2025 event.

Public Education and Outreach

DNREC utilized public outreach events and gave presentations to spread the recycling and waste reduction message to over 1,500 residents at nineteen events in 2025. DNREC's social media channels were also utilized to reach residents.

DNREC conducted a postcard campaign sending 4 postcards to over 32,000 households in Kent County that resulted in a 14.9% reduction in contamination.

DNREC conducted an email campaign sending 3 emails from the Delaware Business Times to over 13,000 store managers reminding them of the plastic bag ban.

DNREC partnered with the Delaware Apartment Association to send an email to all of its members reminding them of the Universal Recycling Regulation's requirements and the annual notification requirement. It reached 70 property management companies that manage 183 properties.

DNREC engaged in a video ad campaign at the Dover Division of Motor Vehicles to promote the Delaware Recyclopedia search tool. The ad plays 2 times per hour for a total of 4,200 times a year.

The Education Campaign Graphics section on page 14 shows some of the examples of the current outreach material and marketing campaigns that should be the only resources Delaware residents use when determining what to put in their curbside recycling. The Recycling in Delaware poster and How to Guide were updated in 2025 to provide a concise message.

DNREC had 23,801 views of its websites in 2025. These are the combined views for de.gov/recyclopedia, de.gov/recycling and de.gov/composting. There were 34,301 views of the yard waste website (de.gov/yardwaste) that lists yard waste drop off sites available to Delaware residents.

DNREC partners with DSWA, UD Extension offices, Delaware Apartment Association, municipalities, and educational institutions to spread messaging to residents.

Education Campaign Graphics

Recycling in Delaware poster



Recyclopedia flyer



At-store drop-off flyer



Social Media sample



DNREC Activities (continued)

Resource Recycling Systems (RRS) conducted research in 2020-2021 on over 3,200 recycling programs in the U.S. It found that only 9% of programs use either an app or search tool. Delaware is part of that 9%. In 2020, DNREC contracted to develop a new search tool – Recyclopedia. In 2025, DNREC continued to develop and refine Recyclopedia to fit the needs of all Delawareans. This search tool is located on de.gov/recyclopedia. The tool allows residents and businesses of Delaware to know exactly where and how to dispose of over 500 common items that they may no longer have a use for. The app version of Delaware Recyclopedia was released at the end of 2024. It is now available in Google Play and Apple App Store.



Enforcement

DNREC is responsible for enforcing the Universal Recycling Law and Regulations. Numerous waste service providers and residential property managers have been cited for violating the law. DNREC conducted 148 Universal Recycling inspections in 2025.

Delaware Solid Waste Authority (DSWA) Activities

Recycling Drop-Off Centers

DSWA's recycling drop-off centers provide convenient locations for Delaware residents to recycle a variety of materials, including single-stream recyclables, corrugated cardboard, used motor oil, oil filters, household batteries, and electronics. In FY2025, DSWA's drop-off centers and recycling centers collected 1,639 tons of single-stream recyclables and cardboard, supporting responsible waste management and resource recovery.

Electronics Recycling Program

DSWA's Electronics Recycling Program collected 1,042 tons of electronic goods in FY2025, including 5,155 printers, 16,158 televisions, and 32,468 computers. Collections through DSWA centers, special events, schools, nonprofit organizations, and government agencies provide opportunities for responsible electronics recycling throughout Delaware.

Household Hazardous Waste (HHW) Program

DSWA's Household Hazardous Waste Program provided 221 collection events in FY2025 and collected 488 tons of hazardous materials. This total included 409 tons collected at DSWA centers and 79 tons collected through other collection events. The program helps residents safely manage household materials that require special handling and disposal.

Oil Filter and Waste Oil Recycling Program

Through its Oil Filter and Waste Oil Recycling Program, DSWA collected 433 tons of used motor oil and 36 tons of oil filters in FY2025. These materials were sent to Crystal Clean for recycling, helping conserve resources and prevent environmental contamination.

Polystyrene Foam Recycling Program

In partnership with DART Container, DSWA collected 32 tons of polystyrene foam (#6) for recycling in FY2025. This program provides a recycling option for a material that would otherwise contribute to landfill waste.

Household Battery Recycling

In collaboration with Call2Recycle (now The Battery Network), DSWA collected 67 tons of household batteries in FY2025. The program supports responsible battery management and helps keep potentially harmful materials out of the waste stream.

Document Shredding Program
DSWA provided 64 document shredding events in FY2025, helping residents securely dispose of sensitive personal documents. A total of 291 tons of documents were shredded, including 235 tons collected at DSWA centers and 56 tons collected through other collection events.

Public Education and Outreach
In FY2025, DSWA's Environmental Education Centers provided interactive, hands-on learning opportunities for students throughout Delaware. The New Castle center, in its 11th year, welcomed 2,421 students from 61 schools and groups. The Dover center completed its first year, welcoming 1,548 students from 40 schools and groups. DSWA also delivered 90 in-school programs involving 9,000 participants and participated in 35 community events, reaching more than 20,000 people. These efforts expand access to environmental education and encourage responsible waste management.

Community Resources
DSWA encourages Delaware residents to contact the Authority for information about its programs and facilities. Delaware residents can contact DSWA's Citizens' Response Line at 1-800-404-7080, email info@dswa.com, or visit dswa.com for additional information. DNREC and DSWA have partnered to create RecycleRightDE.com as an all-inclusive site on how to dispose of waste in Delaware.

Closing-Statement

We owe it to ourselves and to future generations to manage our state's waste efficiently and responsibly. With several competing uses for land and the desire to maintain Delaware's natural beauty, recycling is an attractive, logical, and responsible alternative to landfilling recyclable materials made from a finite supply of natural resources. We have a responsibility to future generations to conserve non-renewable natural resources. Successful implementation of the program requires the leadership, support, and active participation of the Governor's Office and the General Assembly.