

## "A Conversation with Greenable Woodbridge"... Waste Management, Recycling, & Green Purchasing

### **Sustainability Pillar: Waste Management, Recycling, & Green Purchasing**

***Introduction:*** Solid waste management is a fundamental environmental issue that has plagued society literally back to the dawn of civilization! Fortunately, the cultural revolution of the 1960's led to progressive laws which have been the hallmark of an "environmental ethic" that has spread across the Country since the first "Earth Day" back on March 21, 1970. Here in Woodbridge Township we take sound solid waste management, recycling and green purchasing very seriously! We wanted to share our story, as well as provide background on how solid waste and recycling works in our great State.

New Jersey has long been a National leader in recycling. Over 28 years ago, New Jersey adopted the "Mandatory Source Separation and Recycling Act" – becoming the first State in the country to impose mandatory recycling – while also establishing the most aggressive recycling recovery targets in the United States. Fast forwarding to today we need to ask: who manages solid waste and recycling, what happens to our garbage, how have we done with mandatory recycling and what's happening in our own Woodbridge Township?

***Who Manages Solid Waste and Recycling in New Jersey?***  
Nearly 40 years ago, the State Legislature delegated authority for overall solid waste planning and management to the 21 counties, removing direct control from municipalities. The State adopted general policy direction through a Statewide Solid Waste Plan and each county was also responsible for creating both solid waste and recycling "Master Plans" which remain in effect today. Counties had to develop or identify safe places for solid waste (or garbage) to be taken for the long term. While recycling was mandatory across the State, County Recycling Master Plans identify which specific "materials" must be recycled. Our recycling law also requires "everyone" to recycle – every homeowner, business, institution and industry – no one is categorically exempt!

***So Where Does Our Garbage in Woodbridge Township and Middlesex County Go?***  
Each person in Middlesex County generates approximately 11 lbs. of waste each day, which amounts to 4,000 lbs. of waste per person every year (a whopping 2 tons). That's approximately 500,000 tons of waste per year from over 800,000 residents of Middlesex County. The Middlesex County Utilities Authority (MCUA) has long taken responsibility for solid waste management under the direction of the Middlesex County Board of Chosen Freeholders. The MCUA manages the Middlesex County Landfill in East Brunswick, which has enough capacity to continue accepting Woodbridge Township solid waste for at least the next decade to come. The MCUA

operates a “modern landfill” that has “liners” to prevent ground and surface water contamination from the garbage, as well as “gas recovery systems” to reduce potential odors and recover the gas for energy production in generating electricity. Nearly all household, commercial, institutional and non-hazardous industrial waste generated in Woodbridge and Middlesex County goes to the County Landfill.

### ***How Does Recycling Work Through the County Recycling Master Plan?***

Our State Legislature has set very aggressive targets of recycling at least 50% of the municipal waste stream and 60% of the total waste stream. (The difference is that the 50% goal pertains to what all generators of solid waste placed at the curb, while the total waste stream includes heavy materials like junked cars, large building parts like steel girders and some bulky wastes.) Statewide, New Jersey has achieved a 40% municipal waste stream recycling rate and a 60% total waste stream recycling rate. (According to USEPA, the National recycling rate for the municipal waste stream is 33% so New Jersey is a leader across the country.) “Boots on the ground” recycling is carried out through leadership from each county and the efforts of “Municipal Recycling Coordinators” in each of our 25 towns. Middlesex County has achieved the highest total waste stream recycling rate of any county in New Jersey at about 65% due, in large part to the aggressive leadership of our Board of Chosen Freeholders for literally decades, the dedication of the staff at Middlesex County Division of Solid Waste and the tireless advocacy of our Municipal Recycling Coordinators. Of course, each Woodbridge resident who actively recycles contributes to this success!

### ***What am I required to recycle in Woodbridge Township and Middlesex County?***

Residents (including residents of multifamily dwellings), and occupants of governmental, institutional (schools, colleges, universities), and commercial establishments (retail, restaurants, offices, warehouses, construction sites, etc.) must recycle the following mandated materials:

- Aluminum cans
- Glass bottles and jars
- Steel and tin cans
- Plastic milk, water, soda and laundry bottles (#1 & #2)
- Newspaper
- Corrugated cardboard
- Mixed paper (magazines, office paper, junk mail)
- Textiles
- Computers and televisions
- Rechargeable batteries
- Leaves
- Brush
- Motor oil
- Tires
- White goods (refrigerators, air conditioners, washers, dryers)

In addition, commercial establishments must recycle fluorescent bulbs and new construction sites must recycle clean wood scrap. Also, warehouses, retail, and supermarkets with 25 or more employees must recycle plastic film (stretch/shrink wrap and plastic bags).

### ***How Are We Doing in Woodbridge Township?***

Woodbridge Township is one of the recycling leaders in Middlesex County and the State with a documented recycling rate of nearly 66%! Mayor McCormac has made major changes to both solid waste and recycling programs across the Township. In 2013 we purchased new, automated solid waste collection trucks used by our Department of Public Works to collect material twice per week. These trucks allowed the township to save considerable dollars in reducing collection crew manpower on each truck from 2 staff to 1. Since 2009, the Township has reduced landfill disposal costs by nearly \$136,000 through such efficiency measures. At nearly the same time, we moved to “Single Stream” recycling – putting all recyclables (plastic, glass, bottles and cans, cardboard, paper) in the same container which eliminates the need to separate and/or bundle recyclables and substantially increases the amount of household waste that we recycle. Recycling is a great deal for every Woodbridge Township resident, homeowner, and business. And, recycling is not only profitable; it’s the right thing to do for our environment.

To educate and help our residents recycle more, the Township publishes each year its “Sanitation and Recycling Calendar” which can be accessed through:

<http://www.twp.woodbridge.nj.us/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=r1ZKHi9ZtS0%3d&tabid=259> .

This handy document literally provides “all you need to know” about existing solid waste and recycling programs. It contains: trash and recycling pick-up schedules for each Woodbridge town; special collection day schedules for such things as Christmas Tree pick-up and free Bulk Waste pick-up; listings of what is and isn’t recyclable; hours of operation and an inventory of how to use the Woodbridge Convenience Center located in Keasbey; background on the Woodbridge “Clean Communities” program for litter abatement and associated guidance on stormwater management; tips for “Grasscycling” and yard management; backyard composting; and what to do with your “household hazardous waste.”

Please refer to your 2015 Woodbridge Township Sanitation & Recycling Calendar for detailed information and refer any questions you have to:

Woodbridge Township Recycling: (732) 738-1311 x3049 or

Woodbridge Township Sanitation: (732) 738-1311 x3600

### ***What can I do to Reduce, Reuse & Recycle?***

While the Township prides itself on its Sanitation and Recycling Programs, they are only as good as the participation of our residents, businesses, and daily visitors. Here are some helpful hints on what YOU can do to “Reduce, Reuse & Recycle” toward a goal of eventually getting to a “zero waste” society:

- Compost food and plant scraps in your back-yard;
- Leave grass clippings on your lawn as a natural fertilizer;
- Make sure you are recycling everything mandated by Middlesex County (see above list);
- Don’t add extras to the recycling bin: no bottle caps, spackle buckets, plastic bags, etc.

- Consider recycling extra items separately, such as printer cartridges at the office , or bringing plastic bags back to the grocery store if they collect them;
- Make frequent use of the Woodbridge Convenience Center;
- Recycle as much as possible at the office and at home, even items that are not mandatory such as old carpet, plastic grocery bags, or textiles;
- Bring home and recycle those plastic bottles and soda cans that are generated in the car or where collection receptacles are not offered;
- Bring reusable bags with you for grocery and other shopping;
- Purchase products in concentrated form with less packaging;
- Purchase products with packaging manufactured from “post-consumer” recycled content;
- Pick up litter in your neighborhood and participate in formal “Clean-up days;”
- Ask your place of business to participate in the “Adopt-A-Highway” Program for litter abatement;
- Keep storm drains near you home free of leaves and debris so they can perform their function in managing stormwater flow;
- Put presents in reusable gift bags or wrap them with recycled materials;
- Turn your trash into crafts and works of art;
- Donate used clothing and other items to reputable charities;
- Use washable coffee mugs, plates and silverware rather than disposables;
- Take advantage of Middlesex County sponsored “Household Hazardous Waste Drop Off Days” to properly manage car batteries, gasoline, paints, chemicals, pesticides and other materials that can harm our environment;
- Reuse scrap paper for phone messages and notes;
- Participate in garage sales as “one person’s trash is another’s treasure;”
- Buy less “stuff.”

***To Learn More:*** If interested, please check out the following YouTube videos for more information on the subject referenced:

For food waste recycling:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EwVuz0UJl2A>

For textiles:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CJka9tHkxjs>

Plastic bag recycling via groceries:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7zEBEXPB4c0>

Reducing contamination in recycling programs:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XGC-l8vFxyE>

Making Recycling Fun in Israel:

<http://www.greenprophet.com/2014/11/israeli-recycling-video-goes-viral-on-youtube>