

Promoting sustainability through waste prevention and reuse

Waste prevention, repair and reuse of electronics, clothing, household items and food donation shrinks our carbon footprint, reduces disposal costs and supports Minnesota businesses.

Challenge

Despite maturing compost and recycling programs, Minnesotans are still disposing of more waste - and landfills keep growing. Landfills currently have no formal incentives to reduce the amount of waste they receive.

In 2019, there were 20 active Mixed Municipal Solid Waste (MMSW) landfills, collecting about 2.1 million tons of waste. Landfills produce sizable amounts of greenhouse gases (GHGs) that contribute to climate change. In addition, landfilling uses up valuable space, impacts neighboring communities, and creates costly liabilities even decades after landfills close.

A wide range of prevention and reuse activities - such as food donation, electronics repair, sharing libraries, thrift stores, and refurbishing home furnishings - offer opportunities to prevent items from entering the waste stream. But these waste-prevention activities have not received the attention and support they deserve.

Without action now, Minnesota will continue to expand landfills to accommodate increased generation of waste and will bear the cost (financial and negative impacts to communities) and climate consequences of maintaining landfills. This will be a missed opportunity to support communities and individuals to consume more sustainably, save money, reduce statewide GHG emissions, and bolster the local reuse economy.

Proposal

The Landfill Responsibility Act (LRA) is a new initiative that seeks to slow landfill expansion and lessen GHG emissions by expanding efforts to reuse items and prevent waste creation.

These goals would be achieved through creating an obligation for landfills to decrease their impacts by funding waste prevention and reuse projects at a rate equal to three percent of their annual gross revenue from mixed municipal solid waste (MMSW) disposal. The MPCA will solicit waste prevention and reuse/repair projects and compile an eligible projects list. Landfill operators will choose projects from the list to fund, equal to their three percent obligation, as part of their Waste Prevention Plan. The Waste Prevention Plan is submitted every three years for MPCA approval.

By the numbers:



2.1 million tons of waste accumulated in landfills in 2019



77,800 jobs were related to the reuse, rental and repair industry in 2015



\$10.26 billion in sales are attributed to the reuse, rental and repair industry in 2015



40% of waste prevention and reuse activities would directly benefit underserved communities

For measurement, MPCA will collect the weight of waste that eligible projects divert from landfills and use life cycle assessments to convert these amounts into GHGs saved and other environmental benefits. MPCA will also conduct waste composition studies at landfills to track changes in the amount of various types of material streams and assist with calculating GHG savings.

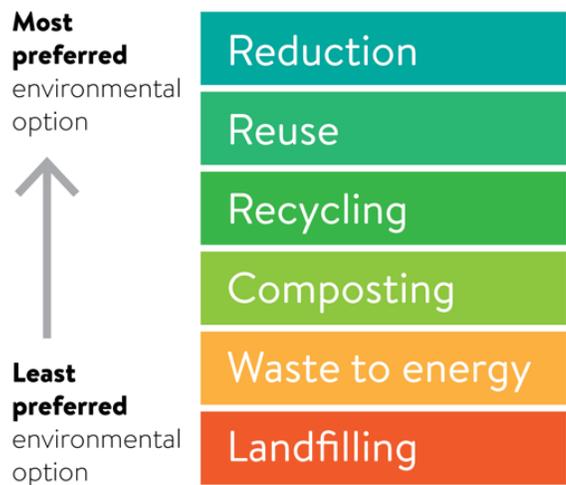
The LRA specifies that 40% of waste prevention and reuse activities must directly serve communities in environmental justice areas. It would provide access to services such as: food donation, repair services, learning opportunities on meal-planning to avoid waste, and skill-building to be able to repair products. It also lessens dependence on landfills, which disproportionately affect environmental justice communities.

Why it's important

The LRA seeks to:

- Save money for individuals and businesses by reducing their waste generation; bolster the reuse economy
- Reduce environmental and climate impacts by incentivizing prevention of waste and material reuse
- Minimize landfill dependence and the costly responsibilities of post-closure care
- Preserve landfill space; minimize landfill impacts to neighboring communities
- Provide access to services for environmental justice (EJ) communities of concern
- Reduces GHG emissions

Minnesota's waste hierarchy



Preventing waste and reusing materials are priorities in Minnesota's efforts to combat climate change. Life cycle assessment data shows significant GHGs are emitted during the production phase of many materials, including food/beverages, electronics, furnishings, and textiles. When we quickly throw things away and replace them, we incur those GHG impacts again, because new products have to be made. That's why preventing waste can reduce GHG emissions. For example, if Minnesotans doubled the useful life of our clothing and household furnishings through increased repair and reuse, the GHG savings would be equal to increasing the efficiency of all Minnesotans' personal vehicles by 15 percent. On average, preventing food from being wasted—for example by using tools to right-size food purchasing and serving at restaurants—saves 20 times more GHG emissions than composting it.

For more information

Greta Gauthier

Assistant Commissioner for Legislative & Intergovernmental Relations Minnesota
Pollution Control Agency

greta.gauthier@state.mn.us

Office: 651-757-2031 • Mobile: 651-338-8955