

MCLEAN COUNTY SOLID WASTE PROGRAM 2020 ANNUAL REPORT



THE ECOLOGY ACTION CENTER COMPLETED THE FOLLOWING ITEMS IN FULFILLMENT OF THE SOLID WASTE AND WASTE REDUCTION EDUCATION PROGRAM AGREEMENT OF JANUARY 1, 2017.

LEADING INDICATORS: SUMMARY OF PROGRESS¹

Goal: Visit **70%** of eligible classrooms in McLean County, Bloomington, and Normal for elementary school recycling and waste reduction education programs. Reaching this target means directly engaging with approximately 1,500 students.

The EAC took a diversified approach to achieving program goals despite COVID-19. Due to the pandemic, spring programs were canceled and most educators opted to schedule fall programs for the next spring semester.

- Year-end total: There are 82 Fourth grade classrooms in McLean County, which includes all public and private schools and represents approximately 1500 students. In 2020, EAC delivered 6 classroom visits (2 in person and 4 virtual) and in these classroom visits met with 125 students. This represents about 7% of our goal.
 - Twenty Elementary Online live programs addressing recycling and solid waste, with a total of 169 students reached (includes asynchronous views).

**2020 TOTAL REACH:
273,070 INTERACTIONS**

DIRECT (LIVE PROGRAMS & EVENTS; PHONE INQUIRIES):
1,853

MEDIA (NEWSLETTER, SOCIAL MEDIA, WEB):
271,217

Goal: Visit **60%** of public libraries within McLean County, Bloomington and Normal and provide a summer reading program on recycling and waste reduction topics. Reaching this target means directly engaging with approximately 300 library patrons.

- Year-end total: There are 14 public libraries in McLean County. In 2020, the EAC was unable to schedule any in-person summer programs due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Goal: Provide recycling and waste reduction presentations for **25** local groups or approximately 750 individuals including civic groups, scouts, preschools, non-target school groups, university classes.³

- Year-end total: In 2020, The EAC conducted 16 programs, reaching 381 people. This represents 64% of the annual program goal.

Goal: Promote recycling and sustainable practices to direct audiences utilizing social media channels including Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and YouTube with a target of **30,000** interactions annually.

¹ The totals below represent year-end numbers. Summaries of this year's activities are described on the pages that follow.

² There are 7 schools, representing 16 classrooms, that have historically declined program invitations. Two schools, representing 5 classes, have not opted for programs since personnel changes in the Education Coordinator position in 2018.

³ In practice, the EAC provides these programs for nearly 100% of those requesting the services.

- ☑ In 2020, our social media posts resulted in 136,911 interactions, which exceeds our annual goal.

Goal: Provide and promote comprehensive online resources on recycling and waste disposal for Bloomington, Normal, and McLean County with a target of **12,000** visits to these pages annually.

- ☑ In 2020, our online waste and recycling resources were visited 41,904 times, which exceeds our annual goal.

COUNTY WASTE GENERATION & RECYCLING RATE

The main goals of the McLean County Solid Waste Program are to increase both recycling and source reduction. The annual measurement and reporting of these rates by the EAC serve as lagging indicators of the success of outreach efforts. The value of this performance indicator is also limited by other factors affecting recycling and waste generation rates, such as accessibility of recycling programs and macroeconomic forces. While quantifying source reduction of municipal solid waste is difficult, tracking recycling rates is much more reliable.

McLean County maintained a steady recycling rate in 2019. The Ecology Action Center's annual calculation of community-wide waste generation and recycling shows that the County maintained a recycling rate of near 46% with no significant change compared to 2018. As a result, the County maintained progress made in the preceding three years, including breaking the previous community-wide recycling goal of 40% and maintaining progress made toward the new community-wide recycling rate goal of 50% set in 2017 under the new Twenty-Year Materials Recovery and Resource Management Plan for McLean County, Bloomington, and Normal, Illinois. No single category of recyclable materials saw significant fluctuations from the year prior, while there were minor fluctuations across the board in all material streams.

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Total MSW Recycled (tons)	81,302	83,335	88,459	94,804	88,330
Total MSW Landfilled (tons)	154,662	120,815	124,364	109,467	104,772
Total Municipal Solid Waste Generated (tons)	235,964	204,150	212,823	204,271	193,102
Recycling Rate	34.5%	40.8%	41.6%	46.4%	45.7%

With the closure of the McLean County Landfill in late 2018, the Ecology Action Center continues to focus on waste management priorities as outlined in the Twenty-Year Materials Recovery and Resource Management Plan for McLean County, Bloomington, and Normal, Illinois. This includes diversion strategies for waste that would otherwise require landfill disposal further away from the source of origin.

SOLID WASTE COORDINATOR ACTIVITIES

- Surveyed area waste haulers, recyclers, municipalities, and institutions to compile relevant data for calculation of 2019 McLean County Solid Waste generation rate and recycling rate, with final results released in early third quarter 2020.
- Ongoing planning, communications, and logistics efforts with partners, including communication with Illinois EPA, for future Household Hazardous Waste Collections, to address funding, location, and other needs. Efforts include our annual Household Hazardous Waste special newsletter.

- Continued extensive efforts to contact apartment landlords to assist with implementation of multi-family housing recycling in the Town of Normal.
- Ongoing updates to Recycle Coach recycling directory application, especially as changes regularly occurred in drop-off and collection programs due to the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Communicated to address COVID-related changes, including shifts in waste collection capacities and schedules, and disposal patterns related to “shelter at home”, as part of supporting local COVID-19 efforts.
- Ongoing preparations coordinating Request for Site Approval process for proposed solid waste transfer station.
- Coordinated opt-in renewal for McLean County in the Consumer Electronics Recycling Act program for 2020 through McLean County Land Use Committee.
- Reviewed proposals for municipal solid waste collection contracts for the City of Bloomington.
- Facilitated two meetings of the Solid Waste Management Advisory Committee
- Attended the regional ILCSWMA conference with discussion on county program updates, new e-waste legislation and pharmaceutical programs.
- Attended the Illinois Recycling Association Annual Conference.

COMMUNITY COMPOSTING PROGRAM

In 2020 EAC launched our Community Composting Program. Designed to serve residents who want to help reduce landfill and generate benefits of composting beyond what can be achieved in a backyard setting, this pay-as-you go service uses a keycard to access the kiosk for convenient, 24/7/365 drop-off. The program accepts all food scraps and leftovers, including vegetables, meats, prepared foods, dairy, bones, egg shells, etc. Biodegradable Products Institute (BPI) certified compostable packaging, paper towels, paper napkins, uncoated paper plates, soiled cardboard/pizza boxes and similar compostable items are also accepted. The first kiosk was opened at Normandy Village in Normal in November of 2020. Feedback about the program has been overwhelmingly positive, and the EAC is working to set up a second compost kiosk in Bloomington at AB Hatchery.



EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

As social distancing recommendations emerged and continued due to the COVID-19 pandemic, spring and summer programs were canceled. In a few cases, single sheet grab-and-go activity flyers were requested in place of in-person or virtual live programming. Schoolteachers elected to defer fall programs, rather than schedule online versions, in the hope that in-person programs could resume later in the '20-'21 school year. Community program requests were few, and virtual programs were offered in place of in-person programs while continuing to support local COVID-19 efforts.

In lieu of traditional elementary programs and to serve community family and educational needs in the absence of school, EAC created "Elementary Online" programs which continued through the summer. Watershed Down StoryMakers is geared toward children ages 7-12. Each small group session starts with a basic story, and participants are asked to make decisions, invent new elements to add to the story, and roll a few dice to create unique adventures in the wonderful world of our watersheds. The Wonder Ears Book Club is a read-aloud experience for children ages 5-12. Just like a grown-up book club, participants are invited to share their ideas, ask questions, and discuss the reading. Story topics include clean water, recycling, and energy conservation.

- **Recycling and Waste Reduction Fourth Grade Presentations:**

- Tri-Valley Elementary (4 classes, 96 students)
- Hudson Elementary (2 classes, 29 students)

2020: 2 Total schools; Total classrooms 6; people: 125

- **Other K-12 School Activities:**

- Recycling program for Homeschool Cooperative Group (1 class, 10 students)
- Presentation for Epiphany Jr. High students on EAC programs and mission regarding solid waste and recycling (2 classes, 35 students)
- Presentation for Calvary Jr. High students on recycling and composting (1 class, 18 students)
- Composting Program for MarcFirst (16 attendees)
- Composting Program for Boys and Girls Club of Bloomington-Normal (16 attendees)
- Composting Program for homeschool group (4 attendees)
- Recycling Presentation for University High School Earth Club (15 attendees)
- Grab 'n' Go "Sorting Boss Toss-Across" game, which helps kids learn which items can be recycled and which ones should be disposed of in the trash, for School Summer Feeding Program (distributed to 155 students)
- Grab 'n' Go "Choose to Reuse" activity worksheet, with instructions for several small projects to effectively reuse items instead of disposing of them, provided to students grades K-8 via the for Back 2 School Alliance (distributed to 3,000 students)

- **Other K-12 Community Activities:**

- Elementary Online (20 sessions, total live participation 52, total including asynchronous views 171)
 - Watershed Down StoryMakers – live online programs in which participants role-played to explore, solve problems, and contribute to creating a story, as a path to learning key solid waste and recycling lessons (8 sessions, total participation 21)
 - Participants picked up litter, sorted recyclables from non-recyclables with a little help from magical creatures (2 participants)
 - Participants picked up and recycled some litter, then discovered how waste that entered storm drains caused problems in an underground amusement park (4 participants)
 - During a canoe trip, participants discovered a bird tangled in discarded plastic, then figured out how to safely help the bird. To protect wildlife, please put plastic in its place! (2 participants)
 - Participants explored underground caverns in a landfill and under a healthy garden, noted how composting is a form of recycling, and saw how reducing/recycling can minimize waste in the environment (1 participant)
 - While on a camping trip, participants were pranked by forest faeries. Turns out the faeries were upset about lots of litter, so participants cleaned up and discussed how litter damages the environment and can pollute water, and what to do with each item (recycle or trash) (2 participants)
 - As carnival volunteers, participants addressed proper disposal of animal waste and litter (4 participants)
 - The group explored a storm drain system and found problems caused by various types of solid waste (2 participants)
 - The group became trapped in a fix-it shop, and figured out that some items in the trash were actually fixable and should not be thrown away (4 participants)
 - The Wonder Ears Book Club - online read-aloud and discussion programs addressing key solid waste and recycling lessons. Readings were provided live and also recorded for asynchronous viewing
 - Live programs: 12 sessions, total participation 31
 - Read and discussed "Earth Day - Hooray!" by Stuart J. Murphy, about recycling (3 participants)
 - Read and discussed "Power Up to Fight Pollution" by Lisa Bullard, about things kids can do to save energy and reduce trash (4 participants)
 - Read and discussed "Not for me, please!: I choose to act green" by Maria Godsey, about things kids can do to reduce, reuse, & recycle, conserve energy and water (2 participants)

- Read and discussed "Over and Under the Pond" by Kate Messner - explored animals that live in Central IL surface waters, and discussed what happens if plastic is not properly recycled and ends up in the water (2 participants)
- Read and discussed "Rally for Recycling" by Lisa Bullard, about ways to reduce, reuse and recycle (3 participants)
- Read and discussed "Watch Over Our Water" by Lisa Bullard - about what kids can do to help conserve and protect fresh water, including proper management of trash and recycling (3 participants)
- Read and discussed "Compost Stew" by Mary McKenna Siddals - compared compost to recycling, and discussed what can be recycled vs composted, and how run-off from compost could pollute water (1 participant)
- Read and discussed "E-I-E-I-O How Old MacDonald Got His Farm" by Matthew Myers, and discussed how solid waste practices including recycling and composting contribute to a better neighborhood for people to live in and enjoy (2 participants)
- Read and discussed "The Sea, the Storm, and the Mangrove Tangle" by Lynne Cherry - discussed habitat and biodiversity, and how our recycling and water stewardship efforts and problems affect wildlife (6 participants)
- Read and discussed "Many: The Diversity of Life on Earth" by Nicola Davies, and discussed how different animals are affected by litter, pollution and water quality, and what kids can do about those things (1 participant)
- Read and discussed "Over and Under the Snow" by Kate Messner, and discussed how environment impacts animals preparing for winter, and how kids can help by recycling and protecting water (2 participants)
- Read and discussed "Power Up to Fight Pollution" by Lisa Bullard, about things kids can do to save energy and reduce trash (2 participants)
- The Wonder Ears Book Club pre-recorded programs: total additional views 117
- Zoosday after-school program - collaboration with Miller Park Zoo – presentation exploring how waste management practices affect animals adapted to particular habitats (7 sessions, total participation 93)
 - Prairie ecosystems (15 attendees).
 - Island ecosystems (15 attendees).
 - Desert ecosystems (13 attendees).
 - Temperate forest ecosystems (13 attendees).
 - Tropical rainforest ecosystems (11 attendees).

- Mountain ecosystems (12 attendees).
 - Agricultural ecosystems (14 attendees).
- "Scavenger hunt" activity flyer promoting proper management of waste for this year's socially distanced Day of Play event organized by the Children's Discovery Museum. Participation was estimated at 4,000 individuals.
- **University Programs:**
 - ISU Careers Chat (Virtual) on the future of solid waste management, skills and education recommended for success solid waste and recycling (sent to 80 students).
- **Other Programs:**
 - McLean County State of the Environment webinar including solid waste professionals; 52 attendees participated in real time, with 654 views of the video after the live event.
 - EAC Earth Day Live event promoting all EAC programs including waste reduction and recycling. 64 participants attended in real time via Facebook Live.
 - Presentation for Lexington Ladies Club on EAC programs and mission regarding solid waste and recycling (12 attendees).
 - Continued distribution of standardized recycling flyer with simplified messaging for Town of Normal and City of Bloomington residents, coupled with increased marketing messages and education outreach addressing issues of contamination.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

- Continued outreach to identify all multi-family housing locations in the Town of Normal and corresponding recycling providers, as all multi-family housing landlords are required by ordinance to provide onsite recycling in Normal. Information will be used to update our RecycleCoach app with more accurate, geographic-specific recycling information to McLean County residents.
- Celebrated America Recycles Day (November 15th) during the month of November by reminding residents that #AmericaRecycles! Celebration focused on collecting election signs for recycling, and combating contamination through a campaign featuring "What Not to Recycle" messages shared via social media platforms to reduce contamination.
- The EAC annually holds a spring Constitution Trail and Sugar Creek clean-up day in April, but staff had to come up with an alternative for 2020. Buckets filled with trash grabbers and garbage bags were placed outside the back door of the Ecology Action Center building, and staff encouraged residents to spend time outdoors picking up litter with their housemates.
- Coordinated large-scale recycling initiative at the twenty-first annual Brüegala Beer Festival at the Normal Corn Crib in partnership with the Bloomington-Normal Jaycees for the third year in a row. Volunteers and EAC staff members worked over the two-day event and diverted recyclable material from the landfill.

- Education Coordinator attended Illinois Recycling Association Annual Conference; America Recycles Day Innovation conference (virtual); webinar on online/virtual education for elementary students; Illinois Sustainability Technology Center webinar on lithium battery recycling; Illinois Sustainability Technology Center "Creative Reuse" webinar.
- Extensive staff time spent researching and developing alternate outreach programs per COVID-19 lockdown requirements.
- Promotion of "RecycleCoach" through social media marketing including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and more.
- Produced one EAC paper newsletter featuring solid waste issues among other topics. Mailed to approximately 113 households and made available as free download on the EAC website.
- Sent monthly issues of the EAC Action News email newsletters to 855 email addresses on average to promote general recycling and waste reduction.
- Promoted waste reduction, recycling, composting and proper disposal of household hazardous wastes through social media. EAC posted messages on its Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube accounts on solid waste topics, with a resulting 136,911 interactions.
- Distributed a special issue EAC Coronavirus email newsletter to 859 email addresses to address questions and adaptive new usage patterns regarding solid waste items.
- Answered 802 phone calls and other inquiries about the disposal of household hazardous waste and recycling.
- Received 41,904 visits to solid waste, recycling, and hazardous waste related pages within EAC's website.
- Promotion and oversight of Recycle Coach, a web and mobile based app that serves as an educational resource for McLean County residents with questions regarding local recycling programs and waste collection services.
 - 992 new subscribers began using the service in 2020, for a total of 8,674 total users, and 285,673 total interactions. Compared to similar municipalities that are also using Recycle Coach, Recycle Coach, usage in Bloomington alone reached approximately 3 times the typical usage rate per 1000 households.
 - A total of 192,959 reminders were sent to residents who elected to receive them, with 74,048 views of Bloomington and Normal residential collections calendars.
 - The Recycle Coach app was used to conduct 12,431 material searches (searches to determine where and how to properly dispose of an item).
 - In addition to these material searches, the app generated 6,235 page views
- Managed and promoted McFreecycle, a free listserv on the internet for the free exchange of materials in McLean County to avoid disposal of useable items. 1,741 current members with an estimated average of 30 messages exchanged monthly. Usage of the service appears to be declining, likely due to redundant "free items" services now available as a part of social media platforms like Facebook and Nextdoor.com. In response to this trend, the EAC has developed guidance for the free exchange of materials using these additional platforms, and continues to provide support for community reuse to avoid disposal of useable items.
- Radio Outreach:

- EAC staff was interviewed on WJBC about Earth Day 50th anniversary and upcoming EAC events (1,000 listeners)
- EAC staff was interviewed on WJBC about backyard composting and Elementary Online programs (1,000 listeners)
- EAC staff was interviewed on WGLT about leaf messaging including composting and raking to curb (20,000 listeners, 10,000 listen to online stream, 10,000 online impressions).
- Radio Bloomington Leaf management ad provided messaging including composting and raking to curb (32,400 listeners, 13,094 streaming).