



Emmet County Department of Public Works

The Emmet County Model

Sustaining Cost-Effective, Comprehensive Resource Recovery Programs

What's Special About the Emmet County Model?

Emmet County's recycling system stands out for several reasons:

- The system is
 - sustainable (16 years and counting),
 - comprehensive (over 35 materials recovered, 11 drop-sites and curbside collection),
 - and thriving (80% of county residents use the recycling program).
- The system does not rely on tax dollars.
- The county has built in an economic incentive for residents and businesses to recycle and reduce their waste.
- The system offers a great value: Emmet County residents essentially get a "package deal" for their waste disposal dollar as both recycling and household chemical disposal services are supported by county Transfer Station revenues.
- The system thoughtfully combines the strengths of the public and private sectors to best serve the interest of the citizens and businesses of Emmet County.

Background

Located in the northern tip of Michigan's Lower Peninsula, Emmet County is largely rural, with a population of roughly 30,000 people. The county's Department of Public Works (DPW) operates cost-effective, self-funded facilities which offer comprehensive recycling, resource recovery, and solid waste transfer services.

Emmet County's Department of Public Works was established in the late 1970s and has owned and operated a solid waste transfer station since 1978. The department's first full-time director was hired in 1990. She was charged with implementing the County's 1988 Solid Waste Management Plan Update which called for establishment of County recycling and household hazardous waste programs. Using the Solid Waste Plan as a road map, the director and the DPW Board started with three steps: 1) a funding committee was established, 2) a solid waste ordinance was drafted, and 3) intergovernmental agreements were signed with participating townships and municipalities.

The Ordinance

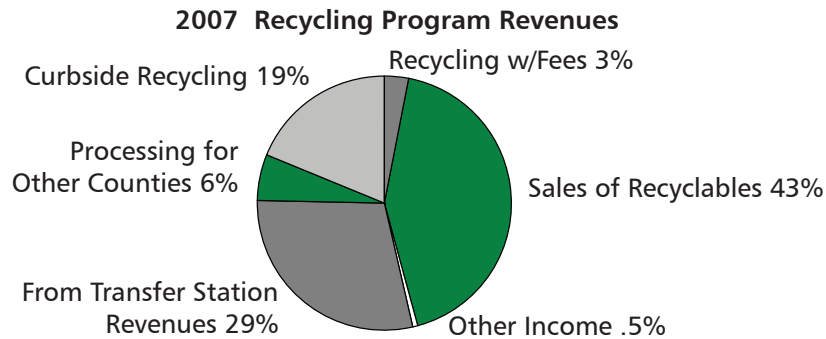
The Emmet County Solid Waste Ordinance requires waste haulers to be licensed by the county. In being licensed, the haulers contractually agree to comply with the Ordinance.

A key provision of the Ordinance requires that waste haulers use the County Transfer Station. This serves to preserve competition by leveling the disposal cost "playing field" for the various waste haulers—local, regional, national, and multinational companies; those who earn thousands and those who earn billions; those who own landfills and those who do not. It also helps provide stable funding for the County's Recycling and Household Hazardous Waste programs. See "Funding" on page 2.

The ordinance also contains a "Pay-As-You-Throw" provision (PAYT) specifying that waste disposal fees must be based on volume (i.e. per bag, cart, or yard) rather than at a flat rate (i.e. a flat monthly rate covering any amount set out). Under PAYT each household or business takes responsibility for the amount of waste they generate: if they generate less garbage they save money, if they generate more garbage they pay proportionately more.

Funding

Emmet County Recycling (ECR) was initially equipped under a millage collecting .25 mills for 2 years. This provided for a truck, drop-off containers, and processing equipment. State grants assisted in funding initial construction and equipment.



Under the mechanism set up by the Funding Committee in 1991, the Recycling Program's main sources of income are sale of recyclables and allocation of funds from Transfer Station revenues. (Of note is the fact that County's Transfer Station rates are nonetheless consistently among the lowest in the region.) On an ongoing basis, this has covered all costs to operate the county's 11 Recycling Drop Sites and the Recycle Processing Facility (MRF). All facilities and systems expansions since 1992 have also been funded by DPW operations.

The DPW operates its own materials recovery facility, markets the recyclables collected, and receives the resulting revenues. Income from the sale of recyclables covers a substantial portion of the operating costs for recycling collection and processing. This is a great benefit for the community, providing jobs and services instead of spending money to bury these resources in a landfill.

From 1992-1999 Emmet County Recycling received no tax dollars. Some tax monies are now received indirectly for enhanced services and services provided to other counties. Specifically, in 2000 neighboring Charlevoix County put in place a millage to fund recycling for their citizens and began paying Emmet County to process their recyclables. And in 2004 ECR entered into contracts with five municipalities to provide curbside collection of recyclables for their residents (60% of the County's total households). The curbside communities pay for the service from their general funds.

Personnel and Contractors

County employees staff the Transfer Station and our Administrative Offices, service the Recycle Drop Sites, drive the Curbside Recycling routes, and operate the Materials Recovery Facility. In addition, the DPW employs a crew from a sheltered workshop and a handful of temporary workers for some sorting of recyclables.

The DPW contracts with private sector companies to provide services where multiple viable vendors make competitive bids possible, for example for hauling and disposal of waste from the Transfer Station. Contract language features built-in incentives to protect and promote the program's interests and vision and also emphasizes public ownership and control. Waste hauling from Emmet County homes and businesses is provided entirely by private waste haulers contracting directly with the customers.

2007 Statistics

- 34.5% of Emmet County's waste stream was recovered
- Over 6,186 tons of material were processed and marketed for recycling through the Emmet County MRF
- \$522,704 in revenue was generated from the sale of recyclables

What's Next?

A Materials Recovery Facility expansion will increase tip-space and bale storage, increase through-put, and improve efficiency. The ability to recycle additional types of material will follow.

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