

# Zero Waste Facts:

## *The CVSWMD's Zero Waste Plan and What It Means for Member Communities*

The Central Vermont Solid Waste Management District serves 22 member communities throughout central Vermont. But unlike other solid waste districts and alliances in the state, our focus reaches beyond simply “managing” waste through recycling and trash collection.

In 2001-2002, the CVSWMD set out to develop a new 10-year solid waste implementation plan; Act 78 and state policy requires this of all solid waste districts and alliances every 10 years, as well as individual towns that choose to “go it alone” and not be part of a district or alliance. The District board and staff set out to develop a Zero Waste solid waste implementation plan, and in 2003 the CVSWMD board approved the plan titled *Working Toward Zero Waste*; it was approved by the state of Vermont in 2006

*Working Toward Zero Waste* is a departure from the current waste management system in place throughout the state and much of the country. Although recycling programs are certainly part of the effort, they are just one means to keeping reusable materials in use. We know that we simply can't get close to Zero Waste through any one program alone. Even with access to a variety of opportunities for recycling – from curbside pickup and bag drop businesses to town, district, and privately owned transfer stations around the state, including the nine CVSWMD recycling depots scattered throughout the District – the overall diversion rate (which includes recycling, reuse, and composting) in Vermont was just 31% in 2001. (*This was the most recent data identified. See: [www.anr.state.vt.us/dec/wastediv/solid/pubs/2001danddfinalreport.pdf](http://www.anr.state.vt.us/dec/wastediv/solid/pubs/2001danddfinalreport.pdf)*)

But working toward Zero Waste can get us on the path to much greater waste reduction, let alone higher diversion rates. The CVSWMD is the first municipal organization east of the Mississippi to commit to a Zero Waste plan, but we are certainly not alone in taking this important step. Many municipalities, businesses, provinces, and even whole countries see Zero Waste as the path to economic and environmental sustainability. *See sidebar on p.2.*

Area businesses also see waste reduction as simply a smart way to work. For example:

- National Life in Montpelier currently recycles 70% of its “waste,” has installed solar panels to reduce its electricity and water heating costs, and is turning its Montpelier site into a “green” campus.
- GU Markets in Hardwick recently began diverting all of its food scraps to composting through the District's hauling route and training by The Highfields Institute (Hardwick). The general manager expects to divert a ton of food scraps each week, and she estimates she could pay for an additional employee's salary just with the money they will save by not having a weekly dumpster pick up! (*source: The Hardwick Gazette*)

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The District sees the potential that real waste reduction offers area businesses and residents, let alone the environment. To move the region toward this vision, the CVSWMMD is striving to develop and support new enterprises that offer residents, businesses, and municipalities more and better options for reusing, repairing, composting and reducing waste. Keeping materials in use is at the heart of Zero Waste. You could say Zero Waste is rooted in Yankee ingenuity and thrift, the sense that materials have value even if they aren't currently being used. **Zero Waste is also about stewardship: being good stewards of lim-**

**ited natural resources, of the environment, and of our Vermont way of life.**

Stewardship involves both “doing no harm” and making decisions based on the best and highest use of resources. Using resources wisely is the basis of Zero Waste, while the idea of “doing no harm” is the basis for the Precautionary Principle. The CVSWMMD’s policy and program decisions address both of these simultaneously. For example, the District will not create or support a policy or action that has a negative impact on the environment simply because it might reduce the amount of trash sent to the landfill.

### More than Just the CVSWMMD!

A Sample of Local Governments, States, and Countries working toward a Zero Waste goal and/or with a Zero Waste strategy

- Central Vermont Solid Waste Management District
- City of Boulder, CO
- City of Oakland, CA
- Del Norte County, CA
- Marin County, CA Joint Powers Authority
- San Francisco City and County, CA
- Seattle, WA
- State of CA, Integrated Waste Management Board
- Matanuska-Susitna Borough, AK
- Logan County, OH
- Sedona, AZ
- Madison, WI
- Buenos Aires, Argentina
- Halifax, Nova Scotia
- City of Nelson, BC
- Metro Vancouver, BC
- Toronto, Ontario
- New Zealand—adopted ZW as a goal for the country
- Scotland—adopted ZW as a goal for the country
- Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council, England
- Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council, Wales
- The State of Western Australia
- The State of Victoria, Australia

### A Sample of Businesses Working Toward ZW

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|--------------------|--------------------|
| Brewers of Ontario | Namibian Breweries |
| Epson, Inc.        | Pillsbury          |
| Fetzer Vineyards   | Ricoh Electronics  |
| Hewlett Packard    | Toyota Corporation |
| Interface, Inc.    | Xerox              |
| Mad River Brewery  |                    |

### Here are a few examples of how the Precautionary Principle influences the District’s work:

- The inclusion of strict Landfill Siting Criteria in our solid waste implementation plan;
- The decision by the CVSWMMD Board of Supervisors to not permit biosolids to be composted (and then applied to lawns and gardens) in our District until there is an adequate means to addressing the heavy metals and pharmaceutical waste in the biosolids; and
- The District’s support of Product Stewardship (see p.3 for full description) which urges manufacturers to not only take responsibility for the waste their products produce, but also the environmental and human health impacts from the toxicity of the materials used to make them and the toxicity of the products themselves.

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### The Precautionary Principle

One of the primary foundations of the precautionary principle and globally accepted definitions results from the work of the Rio Conference, or “Earth Summit,” in 1992.

Principle #15 of the Rio Declaration states: “In order to protect the environment, the precautionary approach shall be widely applied by States according to their capabilities. Where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation.”

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## We Can Get Close to Zero Now!

We can achieve 70% or 80% reduction in waste through Zero Waste by more actively utilizing the waste reduction, recycling, and reuse programs and businesses that exist right now. This leaves the 20% to 30% of the materials in use that cannot be reduced, reused, recycled, or composted because of how they are manufactured; or because manufacturers or retailers require particular combinations of materials in products that cannot be dismantled for reuse or recycling; or simply because they are toxic.

**Getting this remaining 20% to 30% out of the waste stream will require Product Stewardship, and the push for this change is underway in the U.S. and it's already a common practice in Europe.** With Product Stewardship, everyone involved in the product life cycle—the designers, manufacturers, retailers, users, and waste managers—shares the responsibility and costs for reducing the environmental impacts of the product.

Product Stewardship also holds producers liable for the costs of responsibly managing their products at “end of life.” Legislation in many European countries requires manufacturers to take responsibility for the wastes incurred by products and packaging, while some voluntary programs are underway in the U.S. as well. For example, manufacturer “take-back” programs in the U.S. for computers, cell phones, iPods, power tools, and other electronic equipment are offered by Dell, Hewlett Packard, IBM, Apple, Xerox, Bosch, and others in the U.S. In addition, many local hardware stores accept compact fluorescent bulbs for recycling.

Not only do these take-back programs reduce waste but they greatly reduce the load on municipal solid waste district budgets as well. For example, the District subsidizes hazardous waste collections and electronics recycling collections in part with funding from the per capita fees paid by member towns; the user fees collected at these events don't come close to covering the costs of running the collections or getting the materials to recyclers or to safe disposal. But when paint manufacturers, for example, either voluntarily or via legislation are required to take back leftover paint for recycling, the District's costs for hazardous waste disposal will be greatly diminished. The District paid \$53,602 for paint disposal and recycling in calendar year 2008 alone; the figure includes latex and oil-based paint and resins.

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Moving from 31% waste diversion to 70% or 80% won't require a new approach, but it will require a more active approach and one in which the opportunities for reuse, repair, waste reduction, and even recycling are more widespread and cover a wider range of products and materials. This is what the District is investing in, and will continue to invest in, as it works to build the foundation for the region to move toward Zero Waste.

