

Recycling Updates

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources

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DNR Celebrates Recycling Excellence Award Winners In Honor Of America Recycles Day

In honor of America Recycles Day on Nov. 15, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) announces the winners of the 2025 Wisconsin Recycling Excellence Awards.



For the last 13 years, the DNR has celebrated outstanding recycling and waste minimization efforts through its annual awards. In addition to giving recognition, the Recycling Excellence Awards highlight ideas and strategies with proven track records that other organizations may use to improve their recycling endeavors. This year, the DNR is recognizing 22 organizations for going beyond what is required by law.

"This year marks a new record high number of Recycling Excellence Award winners," says Jennifer Semrau, DNR waste reduction and diversion coordinator. "The number of nominations we received exemplified an outstanding commitment to recycling, upcycling, and food waste reduction."

In addition to landfill-banned items, which include curbside recyclables and electronics, the winners diverted many tons of food waste, roof shingles, plastic bags and film, propane cylinders, bicycles, and other common materials for reuse or recycling.

Awards are given in one of four categories: Projects and Initiatives, Overall Program, Special Events and Innovation.

Congratulations to the 2025 Recycling Excellence Award winners:

Projects & Initiatives

- Calumet County VFW Post 3153
- Dane County Department of Waste + Renewables
- Destination Door County
- Milwaukee County Parks - Kosciuszko Community Center (Kozy)
- Oshkosh Correctional Institution (Winnebago County)
- Shorewood Elementary (Dane County)
- Tri-County Recycling (Brown, Outagamie, Winnebago Counties)
- First United Methodist Church of Neenah-Menasha Green Team (Winnebago County)
- Veolia Environmental Solutions and Services (Waukesha County)
- Village of Bayside (Milwaukee County)
- Winsert, LLC (Marinette County)
- Sustain Dane (Dane County)

Overall Program

- Badger Prairie Needs Network (Dane County)
- City of De Pere (Brown County)
- Inpro Corporation (Waukesha County)
- University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (Milwaukee County)
- WasteCap Resource Solutions (Milwaukee County)

Special Events

- Riverfest Inc (La Crosse County)
- 3rd Annual Recycling Extravaganza/Robert Blaus, Event Organizer (Oneida County)

Innovation

- Bikes for Kids Wisconsin (Dane County)
- Merrimac Community School (Sauk County)

Honorable Mention

- Town of Mentor (Clark County)

Winners were asked, "How do you measure success in your recycling or waste diversion program?" A few responses are below.

Destination Door County

"For us, it's not just about tonnage or collection data, it's about behavior change. Every refill at a water station represents one less single-use plastic bottle entering the waste stream, one more person choosing sustainability in a small, everyday way."

– Julie Gilbert, President & CEO

Village of Bayside

"Bayside is committed to leading the way in sustainability through our comprehensive recycling diversion programs. By reducing waste and increasing material recovery through our various events, we're working to preserve our natural resources and protect the environment for future generations. Together, we're building a cleaner, greener community one recycled item at a time."

– Shane Albers, Director of Public Works

Sustain Dane

"Sustain Dane measures success through impact and education. We track the pounds of food scraps collected, the number of people engaged and the reduction in contamination. Just as important, we measure success through education and increased understanding—seeing more people become confident and informed participants in waste diversion. Our goal is to build lasting habits and a strong community to keep valuable materials out of the landfill."

– Samantha Wordette, Program Manager

View winner profiles on the [Wisconsin Recycling Excellence Awards webpage](#).

Photo: Staff at Oshkosh Correctional Institution, winners of a Recycling Excellence Award in Projects and Initiatives category. / Photo Credit: Wisconsin DNR.

History Of America Recycles Day



America Recycles Day (ARD) is the only nationally recognized day dedicated to encouraging Americans to recycle and buy recycled products, and is celebrated

annually on Nov. 15.

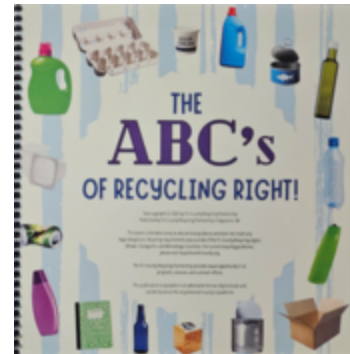
This Nov. 15 marks the 28th anniversary of ARD. Have you ever wondered how it began? America has Texas to thank for this national holiday. Texas Recycles Day started in 1994 as the brainchild of two employees of the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality. They chose Nov. 15 as approximately a half year after Earth Day, and a date after Election Day and before the holidays. The idea to transfer Texas Recycles Day to America Recycles Day was presented to the National Recycling Coalition (NRC), which embraced the idea.

The first national America Recycles Day was on Nov. 15, 1997. On Oct. 1, 1997, the NRC and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) co-sponsored a national press conference at the White House Conference Center, featuring Vice President Al Gore as honorary Chair for the event. The theme was "Buy Recycled," and the press conference featured a model store filled with products made from recycled content. A raffle was offered to those who signed recycling pledge cards, with the raffle winner receiving a free "American Green Dream House," a home built with recycled-content and energy-efficient products. [Learn more about the history of ARD.](#)

[Visit the America Recycles Day website.](#)

Tri-County Recycling Brings The ABC's Of Recycling Right To Northeastern Wisconsin Third Graders

Tri-County Recycling (serving Brown, Outagamie and Winnebago counties) has recently announced the release of "The ABCs of Recycling Right," an engaging new educational resource designed to teach third-grade students the importance of recycling. The book provides up-to-date recycling information using every letter of the alphabet, paired with interactive in-classroom activities that make learning about recycling fun and hands-on.



To support local education and sustainability, Tri-County Recycling is providing free copies of the book to all public and private third-grade classrooms in Brown, Outagamie, and Winnebago counties. By bringing current recycling information directly into classrooms, the partnership aims to spark curiosity, promote responsible environmental practices and empower students to make a positive impact in their communities.

"We're thrilled to bring recycling education back into the classroom in such an interactive way," said Kelly Reyer, Education & Outreach Specialist with Winnebago County Solid Waste. "By combining up-to-date recycling information with hands-on activities, we're helping students understand not just the 'why' but also the 'how' of recycling."

[View the digital version of the ABCs of Recycling Right online.](#)

[Learn more about Tri-County Recycling.](#)

Wisconsin Ranks Number One In The Nation During Fall Drug Take Back Collection



The Wisconsin Department of Justice (DOJ) recently announced that Wisconsin ranked number one throughout the country for the most prescription medications collected during the fall [2025 Drug Take Back collection](#). Wisconsin collected 53,498 lbs. of unwanted medications this fall.

"Wisconsin's continued success with Drug Take Back is really extraordinary," said Attorney General Josh Kaul. "Thank you to the partners around the state whose efforts

have helped make this such an outstanding program in Wisconsin."

Wisconsin has collected a total of 1,422,970 pounds of unwanted medications since Drug Take Back began in 2010 under the leadership of the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA). Wisconsin ranks third in the nation for the most medications collected since its inception, falling only behind Texas, with 1,559,313 pounds, and California, with 1,495,633 pounds. Nationwide, since inception, 20,391,815 pounds of unwanted medications have been collected during Drug Take Back events.

The DEA leads two Drug Take Back days a year, one in the spring and one in the fall. The DOJ partners with the Wisconsin Department of Health Services to organize and promote Drug Take Back throughout Wisconsin. Drug Take Back provides a safe, convenient and responsible means of disposal, while also educating the community about the potential abuse and consequences of improper storage and disposal of these medications.

[Read the DOJ press release](#) for more information or visit the DNR's [How to Safely Dispose of Household Pharmaceutical Waste webpage](#).

New Report On Behavior Change Solutions For Household Food Waste Now Available



WORLD
RESOURCES
INSTITUTE

The World Resources Institute recently published [Identifying Priority Behavior Change Solutions To Key Drivers Of Household Food Waste In](#)

[The United States](#). This new report identifies key behavioral drivers of food waste in the U.S. and matches them with practical, scalable solutions. The findings highlight how shortfalls in consumers' opportunities and abilities to reduce waste influence behavior and stress the importance of targeted interventions that can shift behavior at scale.

Nominate For A 2026 Wisconsin Association for Environmental Education Award

Wisconsin Association for Environmental Education (WAE) award's program strives to acknowledge and encourage outstanding individuals and groups in their contributions to the field of environmental education. WAE recognizes schools, youth groups, individual students, educators and administrators for outstanding environmental efforts each year.



Know an outstanding educator, administrator, student, student group, eco-justice advocate or leader in environmental education? Nominate them for a 2026 WAE Award! Nominations will be accepted until Jan. 10, 2026.

[Learn more and nominate online](#).

Upcoming Webinars, Online Conferences And Events

**All times are in Central Time.*

Extended Producer Responsibility Across Industries

Nov. 17, 11 a.m.

Hosted by Environmental Law Institute

[Register online.](#)

Hazardous Materials In The Waste Stream: Impacts And Mitigation Strategies

Nov. 17, 12:30 p.m.

Hosted by Northeast Recycling Council (NERC)

[Register online.](#)

Why Recycling And The Circular Economy Are An America First Strategy For Economic Development And Climate Action

Nov. 18, 10 a.m.

Hosted by Michigan Sustainable Business Forum

[Register online.](#)

Squaring The Circular Economy: How To Make Reducing Waste Easy For All

Nov. 19, 6 a.m.

Hosted by be Waste Wise

[Register online.](#)

Deposit Return Systems: Advancing America's Circular Economy

Nov. 20, 10 a.m.

Hosted by National Stewardship Action Council

[Register online.](#)

Stakeholder Engagement With Local Farms And Agriculture Partners

Nov. 20, 12:30 p.m.

Hosted by Northeast Recycling Council (NERC)

[Register online.](#)

How Rubber-Modified Asphalt Delivers Cost-Savings And Longer Lasting Sustainable Roads And Pavements

Nov. 20, 1 p.m.

Hosted by Tire Recycling Foundation

[Register online.](#)

An Introduction To Battery Circularity: Powering A Sustainable Energy Future

Nov. 26, 8 a.m.

Hosted by beWasteWise

[Register online.](#)

Material Reuse Forum 11: Government Policies To Elevate Reuse

Dec. 2, 12:30 p.m.

Hosted by Northeast Recycling Council (NERC)

[Register online.](#)

Expanding Organics Access Across Communities

Dec. 4, 11 a.m.

Hosted by metroSTOR

[Register online.](#)

Keep Compost Local: A Roadmap For Public-Private Partnerships

Dec. 9, 11 a.m.

Hosted by Institute for Local Self Reliance

[Register online.](#)

Beyond The Basics: Advancing EPR In The Great Lakes Region

Dec. 10, noon

Hosted by Council of the Great Lakes Region and the Product Stewardship Institute

[Register online.](#)

Certified Compostable Products: Perspectives

Dec. 11, 12:30 p.m.

Hosted by Northeast Recycling Council (NERC)

[Register online.](#)

Several webinars can also be found on the [Public Resources-Product Stewardship Institute](#), the [EPA's Sustainable Materials Management Program](#) and the [Northeast Recycling Council](#) websites.



Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources

You are subscribed to the Recycling Updates from the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. These updates are now available only through periodic email newsletters. For information on past updates or to share new information, please contact Jennifer Semrau at Jennifer.Semrau@wisconsin.gov.