
NEWS RELEASE

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Boosting Michigan's recycling rate would substantially cut greenhouse gas emissions

Report shows broad benefits to increasing recycling rate to Great Lakes average

LANSING – Michigan could cut its greenhouse gas emissions by 2.2 million metric tons annually – the equivalent of eliminating 400,000 cars from the state's roads – simply by upping its recycling rate to match the Great Lakes state average, a report released today by the Michigan Recycling Partnership shows.

“If Michigan worked as hard at recycling as its neighbors do, it could make a significant reduction in its greenhouse gas emissions,” said William Rustem, president and CEO of Lansing-based Public Sector Consultants Inc., which produced the report.

Michigan could make that happen simply by recycling 30 percent of its waste – the average among Great Lakes states – instead of just 20 percent, the lowest rate in the region.

The benefits of increasing Michigan's recycling rate to the Great Lakes average are substantial, as noted in the report. Upping the rate would reduce annual greenhouse gas emissions by an amount equal to:

- Saving 250 million gallons of gasoline,
- Conserving electrical power for more than 300,000 homes or
- Preserving more than 15,000 acres of rainforest, about the area of the city of Ann Arbor.

“Many Michigan residents don't realize our state is so far behind when it comes to recycling,” said Bonnie Bochniak, chairperson of the Michigan Recycling Partnership, which commissioned the report. “These findings should be a wake-up call for Michigan to get serious about developing a comprehensive approach to recycling, and Earth Day 2010 is a perfect time to issue it.”

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Ironically, Michigan's recycling rate is lower than those of five neighboring Great Lakes states, even though Michigan is the only one with a bottle deposit law.

Recycling valuable materials – aluminum, steel, plastic, paper, glass and more – from Michigan's waste stream substantially reduces the carbon emissions created when raw materials are instead extracted from the earth to make those products. Recycling also cuts carbon emissions created when products are manufactured. And it avoids the emissions associated with landfilling or burning carbon-based wastes.

“Education is key. Once people understand the broad benefits of increasing Michigan's recycling rate, the already substantial public support for comprehensive recycling can only grow,” Bochniak said.

Comprehensive recycling would include convenient curbside recycling programs and local drop-off stations for a variety of materials. It would include aluminum, paper, glass bottles and plastic containers that now mostly are spilled into landfills and incinerators.

An overwhelming number of Michigan residents – 81 percent – support a comprehensive, statewide program to make it easier to recycle a whole range of household waste, according to an April 2009 poll. The statewide telephone poll, conducted by Lansing-based Marketing Resource Group, found 57 percent strongly favored comprehensive recycling and 24 percent “somewhat” favored it. That number has remained fairly consistent in polling over the past decade.

Studies show only 37 percent of Michigan residents have access to convenient curbside recycling, the lowest in the Great Lakes region.

The Michigan Recycling Partnership represents more than 25,000 Michigan businesses that support comprehensive recycling. It is working to move the state beyond its current piecemeal approach to recycling, to a more comprehensive policy that addresses more kinds of waste.

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