

# The Next Generation of Recycling in Rhode Island

Sheila Dormody

Big changes are underway at the Rhode Island Resource Recovery Corporation that will allow Rhode Islanders to recycle more and save money for Rhode Island cities and towns. This new program is the first major change to Rhode Island's recycling system since the launch of the Maximum Recycling program in the 1990s.

The recycling facility at the Central Landfill in Johnston is undergoing major renovations right now. The new recycling program projected for April 2012, will be launched right around Earth Day. The new system will allow the RIRRC to comply with the state law that requires them to provide recycling for several more kinds of plastics—instead of just the bottles and jugs accepted in the current program. The system will also help Rhode Island cities and towns meet the requirement to recycle at least 35% of their waste. Right now the majority of Rhode Island communities are not meeting that goal—with a statewide average of approximately 24%.

With the new sorting technology in place, Rhode Islanders won't need to separate their recycling with paper in one bin and bottles and plastics in the other. All of the recyclable material can go into the bin together and get sorted at the new facility. Instead of having to manually sort all the recycling as it comes in, optic scanners will detect and sort many of the materials. (Check out this [video](#) to get the picture of how it works now.)

RIRRC's projections show that this "single stream" technology and the new kinds of recyclables allowed will improve Rhode Island's recycling rate by 20–40% overall.

And that big jump in recycling amounts isn't just good for the environment; it means both more savings and more money back for cities and towns. RIRRC charges per ton for trash dumped at the landfill, but it is free to bring recyclables to their recycling facility. With the opportunity to add 50,000 tons more of recyclables into the mix, Rhode Island municipalities can avoid up to \$2 million in tipping fees by increasing their recycling.

Additionally, communities get money back because RIRRC bales and sells the metals, plastics and paper that come for recycling as commodities to be made into new products. 50% of the profits from those sales are shared with the municipalities. This year, RIRRC gave back \$1.8 million through this profit share program. The communities that recycle the most



Watch a video about Rhode Island's Resource Recovery Center and the need for better regulations on hazardous materials at [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com). Photo: Stillframe from video.

tons get the most back. With 20–40% more recycling, those returns will only get better.

The new state-of-the-art recycling facility will come at an investment of \$16.9 million in capital expenses. While the project is self-funded and won't require any borrowing, it is expected to pay for itself within five years because it will be able to handle a greater volume.

As RIRRC prepares to launch the program next year, keep an eye out for more mailings and news about what changes are coming to allow you to recycle more and what it means in your community.

*~Sheila Dormody is the co-director for the New England Clean Water Action.*

## Go Deeper!

You can find detailed information at [www.rirc.org](http://www.rirc.org) about how your city or town is meeting its recycling goals and what [you can recycle](#) in Rhode Island so you can help the environment and save money for your community.