

Tips to increase recycling participation

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Each year, the Department of Natural Resources Recycling Program asks recycling responsible units (RUs) that have not met their annual recycling standard to explain why they are unable to meet the standard and what actions they will implement to meet the standard in the future. This document contains recommended actions for common obstacles in order to assist RUs in meeting the standard for recycling tonnages.

Each of the obstacles listed below reflect legitimate struggles for RUs, which is why the DNR provides RUs the opportunity to explain their challenges and their plans to meet them in their annual reports. Complications arise when an RU reports the same reasons for not meeting the recycling standard year after year with no change or documented effort to change. The obstacles listed here should be short term issues (lasting a few reporting years at most) that the RU actively works to fix.

RUs may also contact their [regional recycling specialist](#) for answers to recycling questions, tips and ideas. For contact information, search “recycling specialist” at dnr.wi.gov.

Common obstacles to meeting the RU annual recycling standard

If hyperlinks are enabled, select the obstacle below to jump to suggestions for action.

1. [Residential recycling tonnages from apartment complexes and institutions such as universities or correctional facilities are not counted in the recycling tonnage of the RU.](#)
2. [A tribal RU and a municipal RU have overlapping boundaries, causing portions of the population to be counted twice or not counted.](#)
3. [Residents are choosing individual subscription service for curbside collection of recyclables instead of using the RU drop-off location.](#)
4. [The drop-off recycling facility has inadequate hours of operation or is a hard-to-reach site.](#)
5. [There is a lack of recycling education and awareness.](#)
6. [The RU has a large seasonal population.](#)
7. [Residents burn their garbage and recyclables.](#)
8. [The hauler won't provide the recycling tonnages.](#)
9. [The RU donates all aluminum to the local non-profits \(church, youth groups, scout groups, etc.\).](#)
10. [The RU has few recyclables due to a decrease in newspaper sales, more waste elimination and reuse, an increase in canning and “light weighting” of material.](#)
11. [The RU has few recyclables due to a large representation of a religion or culture that generates minimal waste and recyclables.](#)
12. [The RU suspects individual residents are not using their recycling bins correctly but is having trouble identifying these residents and/or reaching out to them.](#)

1. Residential recycling tonnages from apartment complexes and institutions such as universities or correctional facilities are not counted in the recycling tonnage of the RU.

If the residents are included in the Wisconsin Department of Administration official census, the RU can use the recycling tonnage numbers collected from these facilities toward their overall tonnage. Institutional populations counted by the DOA include correctional facilities, nursing homes, military barracks and universities/colleges. The annual report asks for residential recycling tonnages so the RU should work with the institution to obtain the residential recycling tonnage. For example, a university would be able to include the recycling from their dormitories and cafeterias but not from their classroom buildings. The tonnage numbers can be entered into the report in section 3B by checking the box labeled “We collect materials from multi-family residences with 5 or more units.” The RU should obtain documentation from the facility recording the amount of recyclables collected and who collected them.

2. A tribal RU and a municipal RU have overlapping boundaries, causing parts of the population to be counted twice or not counted.

Determining the population of a tribal RU or an RU bordering a tribal RU can be very difficult due to the overlap of tribal and nontribal boundaries. Tribal and municipal RUs that have population discrepancies due to borders should work with their [regional recycling specialist](#) to determine which population to use in calculating whether the RU is meeting the recycling standard.

3. Residents are choosing individual subscription service for curbside collection of recyclables instead of using the RU drop-off location.

Many residents may choose to contract with a hauler for the convenience of curbside recycling. Unless the hauler reports its recycling to the RU, this practice can result in an under-reporting of the total amount of residential recycling that actually occurs. To address the issue, RUs can contact the haulers that provide subscription service in their community and request the recycling tonnages that were collected in the areas for which they are responsible. Since haulers are not required to provide recycling tonnages unless they have a contract with the RU, the DNR recommends that RUs inform haulers they will be seeking for this information early so they are prepared. It may also be helpful to require haulers to [register with the RU](#). Registration would enable the RU to get the data on recycling tonnages by a certain date that is agreed upon by the RU and the hauler.

4. The drop-off recycling facility has inadequate hours of operation or is a hard-to-reach site.

If residents are not using a recycling drop-off site because of limited or inadequate hours of operation, then the facility is not meeting residents’ needs and the RU will need to make changes to its recycling program. Increased education about the importance of recycling is one way to encourage more residents to use the drop-off facility or to obtain subscription service. If increased education does not work, the RU may need to consider changes to the hours or location of the collection facility, a change to single-stream recycling or a change to curbside collection. Subsection [NR 544.05\(1\)\(c\), Wisconsin](#)

[Administrative Code](#), requires a drop-off site be open a minimum of two days per month for five hours each day.

If a hard-to-reach drop-off site is causing a large number of residents to choose to use subscription service (paying for their own curbside collection of recyclables), an RU will need to work with the haulers offering subscription service in the area to determine the recycling tonnages collected from these properties and include them in their annual report. See the [response to obstacle #3 above](#) for more information.

5. There is a lack of recycling education and awareness.

Annual recycling outreach is a requirement for maintaining an effective recycling program. RUs can spread information about their recycling services with or on tax bill mailings, in a newsletter, with collection schedule or drop-off hours, on a website, during elections or other town events, via an email distribution list, in a local newspaper, with new resident information and/or with outreach to schools.

The DNR's recycling education and outreach Web page has [recycling education publications](#) available for free to help RUs educate their residents on many recycling-related topics. These publications are available in print or electronic format by searching "recycling outreach" at dnr.wi.gov.

In addition, the online [UW-Extension Recycling Brochure Creation Tool](#) (available at www4.uwm.edu/Dept/shwec/brochure/) allows RUs to create custom brochures with specific information on which recyclables are collected in their area and how residents can prepare items for recycling.

RUs can also contact their hauler or materials recovery facility for informational flyers.

6. The RU has a large seasonal population.

Seasonal populations are not included in the population data provided by the Census Bureau used in calculating an RU's per capita recycling standard. This means that high seasonal populations should actually result in higher per capita recycling rates, not lower ones. To capture recycling tonnages from the seasonal population, RUs may consider working with businesses that own rental properties to include recycling information in their welcome packets or posting recycling information in locations available to everyone in the community, such as on a town website or in mailings that the municipality sends during the summer months. RUs can remind property owners that Wisconsin's recycling laws apply to everyone, including seasonal tenants, and that it is the responsibility of the property owner/manager to inform tenants of recycling requirements and locations.

7. Residents burn their garbage and recyclables.

It is unlawful for residents to burn recyclables. Every RU has an ordinance that includes mandatory recycling of plastic containers, glass containers, steel and bi-metal containers, aluminum containers, paper and cardboard. While state law allows burning of small amounts of dry rubbish from a single family household when burned on the same property on which it was generated, all burning is discouraged and the local government may have a burning ordinance with stricter requirements. Items that cannot be recycled should be disposed of in a landfill or other approved facility. RUs can inform residents that burning recyclables is not only unlawful but also potentially unhealthy. The low temperatures reached in burn barrels release toxic substances from plastics, inks, foils

and other packaging. Open burning is also the leading cause of wild fires in the state. More information on this topic is available by searching "[open burning](#)" at [dnr.wi.gov](#).

8. The hauler won't provide the recycling tonnages.

Subsection [NR 502.06 \(4\)\(er\), Wisconsin Administrative Code](#), requires licensed waste haulers to give RUs information regarding the amount of recyclable materials collected under contract with an RU within four weeks of a written request. RUs can request this information well before their annual report is due to ensure the hauler has time to respond. RUs may also consider including a date by which the hauler is required to provide the recycling tonnages in their contract.

If an RU is not under contract with a hauler, the RU may consider a formal agreement with haulers in the community to provide this information or require it be reported under local ordinance. The information would include a date by which the hauler will provide the tonnage numbers. RUs can inform the hauler of the dates early and contact a [regional recycling specialist](#) if they are not able to obtain the necessary information.

9. The RU donates all aluminum to the local non-profits (church, youth groups, scout groups, etc.).

Donating recyclables is a way to support local causes and non-profits. RUs can account for donated material by asking collection groups to provide the weight of the materials collected and adding this number to their annual report under "Other Processors."

10. The RU has few recyclables due to a decrease in newspaper sales, more waste elimination and reuse, an increase in canning foods and "light weighting" of material.

Even with the decline in print newspaper, an increased focus on reuse and light weighting of material, the standard set by the department is very achievable. The rural recycling standard comes out to recycling 3.6 ounces of material per person per day. A single piece of postal mail weighs about one ounce.

All recycling facilities in the state accept junk mail; magazines; office and loose leaf paper; phone books; paperboard such as cereal boxes, pasta boxes and packaging; paper towel cores; plastic drink bottles; detergent (laundry and dish) bottles; bottles from many cleaning products; milk jugs; glass drink bottles; glass food jars; steel and bi-metal food cans; pet food cans and aluminum cans. In addition to these items many recycling facilities can take an even wider range of recyclables. Recycling this wide variety of materials should easily amount to over 25 ounces of recyclables per person per week. See the [response to obstacle #5 above](#) for more information.

11. The RU has few recyclables due to a large representation of a religion or culture that generates minimal waste and recyclables.

Wisconsin has the fourth largest Amish population in the country and an RU per capita recycling tonnage may be impacted by a portion of the population that generates minimal volumes of waste and recyclables. However, it is highly probable that there are other opportunities to count recyclables collected from such residents. The rural collection standard of 3.6 ounces of material per person per day is attainable even in cultures that

naturally generate little waste. RUs can work with their [regional recycling specialist](#) to discuss strategies to increase recycling rates in these communities.

12. The RU suspects individual residents are not using their recycling bins correctly but is having trouble identifying these residents and/or reaching out to them.

A “bin-tagging” program can be an effective way for RUs to identify non-recycling or “under recycling” residents and to encourage these residents to recycle more items more frequently. Bin-tagging can also educate residents who mix recyclable and non-recyclable items in their collection bins.

Bin-tagging begins when collection crews or other RU staff members monitor the contents of collection bins and containers before they are collected. Crews or other staff members can “spot check” containers on a random basis or they can watch for residents who do not regularly put out recycling containers for collection. Once a “problem” bin is identified, the RU can take action in four potential steps:

Step one: When a non-recycling or under-recycling resident is identified, RU staff members can attached a color-coded tag to the container after collection (attaching an orange-colored tag with wire works well). The tag should contain clear information (such as a check box) to help the resident understand the problem and a phone number to call for help. The RU should note the address of the tagged bin on a reference sheet and a copy of the sheet should be kept by the RU contact who answers phone calls.

Step two: If the problem persists, the RU can send an educational mailing to the resident. In the great majority of cases, the problem is resolved during the first or second step.

Step three: The garbage/recyclables should be left at the residence with a different color-coded tag attached to the container (red works well). Again, the tag should have information or a check box marked so the resident understands the problem.

Step four: If the problem persists, the RU may issue a citation.

Automated collection makes it harder for collection crews to monitor container contents although some automated collection trucks have cameras mounted on them so that container contents can be more easily monitored. Many communities have used this type of program to successfully maximize the amount of recyclable materials they collect while minimizing contamination.

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