

Clean Green Action's Choose to Reuse events encourage residents to bring in items in good working condition.



And the award goes to...

COMMUNITIES ARE LEADING THE WAY TO RECYCLING EXCELLENCE.

Story by Sherry Wise Bursaw and photos by Carol Davis

When you choose to recycle that plastic bottle or stack of office papers, do you think about Wisconsin's strong history of recycling or the cumulative impacts of recycling efforts undertaken by citizens, visitors and businesses across Wisconsin? Through recycling and composting, we keep almost 2 million tons of material out of Wisconsin landfills every year, conserving energy and resources, and protecting our environment. And, recycling is good for our economy, providing hundreds of local jobs and reusing valuable materials that would otherwise go to waste.

Wisconsin's recycling law bans disposal and incineration of certain materials and endows local government responsible units (RUs) with the responsibility for implementing and enforcing municipal recycling programs. About 1,060 RUs — including municipalities, counties, tribes, solid waste management units and other units of local government — implement local recycling programs.

While each of us plays a part in recycling, many RUs and organizations work especially hard each year to make their recycling programs effective. Through its annual Recycling Excellence Awards, the Department of Natural Resources recognizes the outstanding recycling efforts, innovation, and performance of communities and organizations, both small and large, throughout Wisconsin.

Awards are presented in four categories including overall program, projects and initiatives, special events and innovation. Meet a few of Wisconsin's recycling leaders recognized with awards in 2015:

Overall Recycling Program: City of Middleton's "Clean and Green Middleton"

Over the past seven years, the City of Middleton has offered biannual reuse and recycling events called "Clean & Green Middleton." Led by the city's Sustainability Committee and staffed by hundreds of volunteers, each event was a "one-stop shop" for residents looking to reuse or recycle all kinds of items, including: furniture and household items, durable medical equipment, eyeglasses, books, printer cartridges, electronic equipment and latex paint. Many were donated to local organizations and fundraising efforts.

In response to the success of these events, the city recently opened its new Middleton Recycling Center, a 7,500-square foot drive-through facility that is open on Saturday mornings year-round. Now, residents can conveniently drop off their reusable and recyclable items.

In addition, the city has enacted ordinances that regulate the recycling of plastic bags and construction and demolition waste.

Projects and Initiatives: City of Thorp's "14 in 14"

When the City of Thorp's Energy Independence and Sustainability Board noticed a dramatic decline in the city's recycling — from an average of about 163 pounds per person per year in 2007 to only 94 pounds per person per year in 2011 — they decided that it was time for a change. First, the board worked with city officials to select a garbage disposal company, Express Disposal, willing to partner proactively in the city's recycling efforts.

Next, the board worked to get the community involved by announcing a "14 in 14" initiative with the goal of increasing the city's recycling totals by 14 percent in 2014. To help motivate residents and measure progress, they set up gauges (provided by the high school's Technical Education class) at the City Hall and a downtown park. School competitions got students involved, and one household each month was designated "Recycling Ambassador" based on its excellence in recycling.

The City of Thorp increased its recycling weight total for 2014 by more than 24 percent — nearly twice their original goal! In 2015, they continued to increase recycling efforts, adding a poster contest and "Invention Convention" featuring new and exciting ways for students to reduce, reuse and recycle.

Innovation: Clean Green Action in Wood County's "Recycling Ranger" and "Choose to Reuse" programs

Since forming in 2008, the Clean Green Action citizen's group has worked to bring recycling, education and conservation programs to southern Wood County. One such program is the "Recycling Rangers," a group of volunteers who travel to local events like sports tournaments, fireworks shows and other community celebrations to collect recyclable materials.

Their 18 recycling containers are also available for loan to other organizations and events when the Rangers aren't using them. In 2014, the Rangers collected 780 pounds of cardboard, plastic, aluminum and glass.

Besides their recycling efforts, the Clean Green Action volunteers have initiated community "Choose to Reuse" programs in Portage, Adams and Wood counties.

These programs encourage citizens to bring items in good working condition to a central location where other residents can take them. To encourage other communities to hold these events, the organization has developed a "Choose to Reuse" program manual that's full of tips, tricks and answers to FAQs.

Special Events: Town of Metomen/ Alto Fair Committee and City of Rice Lake's "Operation City Pride"

To encourage recycling, the Town of Metomen makes recycling containers available to local communities free of charge for use at community events. In 2014, the community of Alto used them at the Alto Fair and collected 47 bags of plastic bottles. The containers are also used by the Ripon FFA Alumna for their June Dairy Breakfast each year.

In April 2014, the City of Rice Lake sponsored its first city-wide cleanup,

"Operation City Pride," which provided residents with an opportunity to clean up their properties and beautify the city. Items including household hazardous waste, construction debris, appliances, electronics, brush, household items, medications, furniture and tires could be reused, recycled and disposed of free of charge. More than 700 vehicles went through the event which was funded without the use of tax dollars through the city's solid waste and recycling fund.

Is your community or organization a recycling leader? Nominate them for a 2016 Recycling Excellence Award. For information on how to place a nomination and a list of previous years' winners, visit dnr.wi.gov and enter keywords "recycling awards."

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Items you might find at a Choose to Reuse event include furniture, small appliances, bicycles, office equipment, books, clothes and seasonal decorations.



A Choose to Reuse event held in the Town of Grand Rapids.

DNR'S 2015 RECYCLING EXCELLENCE AWARD WINNERS:

CATEGORY	RECOGNITION	WINNERS
Projects and Initiatives	Recognizes a finite project in 2014 that demonstrated cost effectiveness or potential cost savings while increasing the overall recycling rate.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Town of Cedarburg (Ozaukee County) City of Thorp (Clark County) Honorable Mention: Waukesha County
Overall Programs	Recognizes programs whose outreach efforts are robust and constantly improving and who demonstrate a commitment to improve the overall recycling program.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> City of La Crosse (La Crosse County) City of Onalaska (La Crosse County) City of Middleton (Dane County) Village of Paddock Lake (Kenosha County)
Special Events	Recognizes effective recycling at a special event by offering recycling for the first time or expanding existing programs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Town of Metomen (Fond du Lac County) City of Rice Lake (Barron County)
Innovation	Recognizes a program that demonstrates unique and innovative approaches to recycling.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> City of Milwaukee (Milwaukee County) Waukesha County Clean Green Action Organization (Wood, Portage and Adams counties)