

ANNUAL REPORT



2021



Metro Waste Authority



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Metro Waste Authority
provides answers for
safe, smart
disposal and recycling.



VALUES



Integrity

Always do what's right.



Teamwork

Collaborate!

Together, we will address opportunities and challenges.



Positivity

Bring my best to every task, every day.

Bring out the best in my colleagues.



Innovation

Forge a new path.

Evolve!



Leadership

Set the example.

Everyone's a leader.

OVERVIEW

Metro Waste Authority's approach to managing Central Iowa's garbage, recycling, yard waste, hazardous waste, environmental education, landfill management, and solid waste transportation is regional, just as it was when the agency was formed in 1969. Offering nearly all solid waste services for more than 30 communities and two counties, Metro Waste Authority minimizes the duplication of resources and keeps residents' and businesses' tonnage rates among the lowest in the country. Metro Waste Authority is an innovator, leader, and facilitator that keeps safe, smart disposal options top-of-mind and easily achievable in the region.

Each year, staff focuses on achieving objectives around these six simply-stated, yet complex goals:

- 1. Provide safe, smart recycling and disposal options for residents.**
- 2. Provide safe, smart recycling and disposal options for businesses.**
- 3. Introduce and maintain robust, innovative recycling programs.**
- 4. Ensure each facility is innovative, efficient, and environmentally focused.**
- 5. Ensure each facility is an asset to our communities.**
- 6. Encourage employees to reach their fullest potential.**

Together, Metro Waste Authority's Board of Directors, staff, facilities, programs, and services carry out the vision of achieving "no wasted resources" in Central Iowa.

LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

This past year was one of growth and innovation for Metro Waste Authority.

While we—like the rest of the world - continuously navigated numerous pandemic uncertainties, our commitment to providing safe, smart waste and recycling solutions for the region remained unchanged.

In 2021, we completed construction and began operations at the agency's very own, state-of-the-art recycling facility, providing a sustainable future for recycling in the region. We also strengthened our established programs and services through proactive investment in our facilities and equipment, securing grant funds for innovative new projects, and restructuring service models to significantly improve the resident experience.

As we expanded our programs and services and continued to serve our member communities, we also focused on internal development. We welcomed dozens of new faces to the agency and streamlined internal operations, improving the recruiting and onboarding experience and providing more opportunities for employees to reach their fullest potential.

As the region's needs continue to transform in the year ahead, Metro Waste Authority and our Board of Directors will continue to evolve priorities, programs, and services to ensure we provide excellent service to Central Iowa and beyond.

I hope you enjoy this report, highlighting key areas of focus over the past year, the challenges we faced, and the results our combined efforts achieved.



Cheers,

A handwritten signature in white ink, reading "Michael McCoy". The signature is fluid and stylized, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Michael McCoy
Executive Director

METRO PARK EAST LANDFILL

Metro Park East Landfill, the largest sanitary landfill in Iowa, is located just outside of Mitchellville. In 1971, the site accepted its first load of garbage, leaving the region's use of "dumps" in the past.

Metro Park East Landfill is a scientifically engineered landfill, carefully constructed to protect land, groundwater, and air quality. Although the site was designed to serve as the final resting place for Polk County's garbage, today it is much more. Now, 51 years later, this location pioneers the organization's vision of "no wasted resources."

In addition to properly managing garbage, many services exist on-site to prevent materials (such as tires, appliances, shingles, yard waste, televisions, and construction and demolition debris) from ever entering the landfill.

536,697
tons of garbage received

9,870
tons of shingles recycled

5,174
appliances recycled

METRO PARK EAST LANDFILL

- An appliance demanufacturing program was established after staff saw a decline in vendors offering the service. Since the program's launch, more than 5,000 appliances and more than 400 tons of scrap metal have been recycled!
- Landfills are constructed to efficiently manage garbage day-to-day. For long-term efficiency, and to ensure our resources are put to highest and best use, Metro Waste Authority engaged in a 40-year master plan of this site. The plan will guide cell placement and construction, prioritizing optimal land use, soil balance, and environmental protection.



METRO COMPOST CENTER

Through the Compost It! yard waste program, residents in participating communities can conveniently dispose of yard and garden waste at the curb. This waste is brought to the nine-acre Metro Compost Center at Metro Park East Landfill to be ground, turned, and maintained for nine to 12 months as it decomposes. Once ready, it is screened, tested, certified, and sold as Grow Gold Compost, a natural soil enhancer.

- Grow Gold Compost is in high demand. Significant investments were made to improve infrastructure and produce this natural soil enhancer faster. Through the addition of a windrow turner and sprinkler system, the yard waste will maintain high temperatures and decompose faster.
- More than 128 cubic yards of Grow Gold compost were donated to Metro Waste Authority member communities. This is a way to give back to the cities whose residential yard waste is used to make Grow Gold. The donated compost was used in projects such as city gardens, plantings in medians, or other beautification efforts.

METRO COMPOST CENTER



41,187

tons of yard waste collected

26,732

cubic yards of Grow
Gold Compost sold

METRO PARK WEST LANDFILL

Metro Park West Landfill is located just outside Perry. Metro Waste Authority purchased the facility in 2009, making the site a public, rather than private, landfill for the first time since the 1970s. Metro Park West's landfill space is carefully crafted, with four layers above and below the garbage, to ensure the land and groundwater are always protected. This site gives Metro Waste Authority a footprint in Dallas County, providing safe, smart disposal options for its businesses and residents. While the landfill provides a responsible destination for garbage, the site also offers alternative disposal options for items that don't belong in the landfill (such as tires, appliances, and household hazardous waste).

- Metro Waste Authority acquired three acres of land north of the landfill. This allows for future expansion of the site and installation of an access road.

48,814
tons of garbage received

240
pounds of household
hazardous waste collected

3.56
tons of shingles recycled

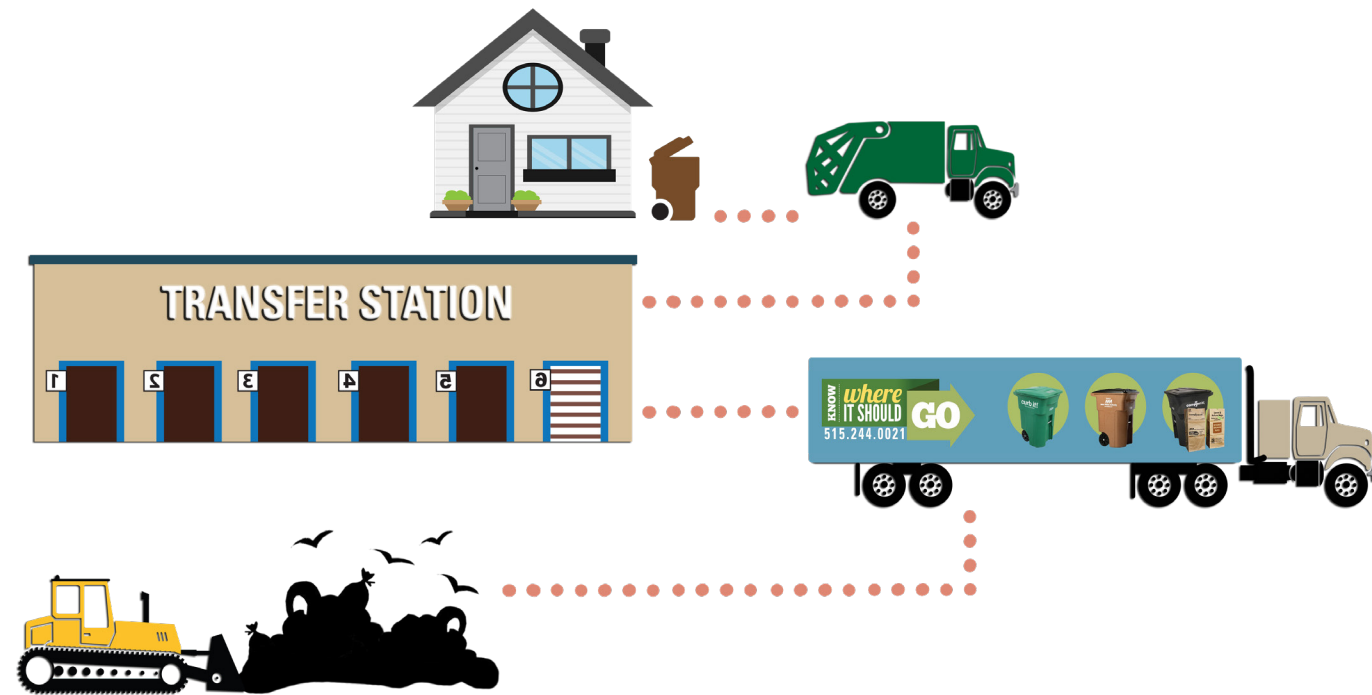
647
appliances recycled

METRO PARK WEST LANDFILL

- Thousands of railroad ties came with the purchase of the landfill and posed an ongoing disposal challenge until August. Thanks to innovation and hard work of staff, a plan was developed and approved by the Iowa DNR to grind the railroad ties and utilize the wood chips as part of daily cover placed on the landfill. This recycling solution came at a convenient time when the soil used as normal daily cover was in very low supply.
- Metro Park West Landfill is more than a destination for garbage. The facility partners with Dallas County to offer four free recycling drop-off locations throughout the region for residents and small businesses to utilize. Items brought to the facility, such as TVs, tires, and appliances are also diverted from the landfill.



TRANSFER STATIONS



TRANSFER STATIONS

Metro Waste Authority has two strategically placed transfer stations in the metro; Metro Northwest Transfer Station in Grimes and Metro Central Transfer Station in Des Moines. These sites serve as temporary hubs for both residential and commercial waste, as it's quickly offloaded by haulers, then loaded into Metro Waste Authority semis to be transferred to the landfill. One semi-trailer holds the same amount of waste as four and a half garbage trucks. This system increases collection efficiencies, thus, lowering collection costs, reducing fuel consumption, improving air quality, and enhancing road safety.

- This efficiency footprint was used at Metro Northwest Transfer Station to provide the western suburbs with increased access to convenient disposal options. Residents can visit the site to properly dispose of household hazardous waste and recyclables and even purchase compost for their lawns and gardens.
- Staff identified a significant amount of metal and appliances in garbage loads brought to the transfer stations. Staff established a process to salvage appliances from the garbage destined for the landfill. The metal is recycled now. Since the program's inception, 34 tons were reclaimed.

287,549
tons of garbage received

114,251
pounds of household
hazardous material
safely disposed

METRO HAZARDOUS WASTE DROP-OFF

Metro Hazardous Waste Drop-Off, located in Bondurant, safely processes and disposes of hazardous waste brought in by residents and businesses. It also handles material collected from the Grimes satellite location, the houseside collection program, and 20 additional counties across Iowa.

- Metro Hazardous Waste Drop-Off partners with 20 counties across the state to offer hazardous waste collection. Through this partnership, Metro Waste Authority hosts temporary collection sites for our staff to collect and process for safe disposal. This year, 136,577 pounds of hazardous material was collected through these satellite partners.
- Much of the material received through hazardous waste disposal is repurposed through a Swap Shop. In 2021, 130,193 pounds of material was swapped. Visitors pick up cleaning products, paints, and other partially used products free of charge.



485,941

pounds of
hazardous material
safely disposed

130,193

pounds of
material repurposed
in the Swap Shop

CENTRAL OFFICE

Metro Waste Authority's administrative office is located in East Village, downtown Des Moines. This location is central to supporting staff, facilities, programs, and services across the organization. Administrative functions, including customer care, finance, and public affairs, operate from this site. It is also host to the agency's Board of Directors' monthly meetings. Metro Waste Authority opened the building in 2002 and rents the excess space to various tenants who represent a variety of services.

- The agency navigated a competitive job market with a focused retaining and recruiting strategy. Metro Waste Authority put tools in place to open up lines of communication between staff and management. New hire and exit interviews are a great way to capture feedback and address unknown challenges while also recognizing areas of significant value.
- Human Resources led efforts to understand which benefits are most valued by existing staff and conducted a compensation analysis to ensure we're paying competitively in the market.
- New hiring strategies were deployed, including collaboration with partners to employ Afghanistan refugees, as well as partnering with temp agencies to create a temp-to-hire model for more transient positions.

100

employees supported

8

locations supported



METRO RECYCLING FACILITY

In November 2021, Metro Waste Authority began operations at its seventh facility, the new Metro Recycling Facility. After several years of deliberation, the agency opened the facility with the goal of making the same positive impact on recycling for the region as it has for garbage. This new 101,100 square foot facility was built with advanced technology, strategic partnerships, and enhanced education to process recycling collected through the agency's Curb It! Recycling program and beyond for generations to come.

- Strong commodity markets resulted in revenue 114% above budgeted projections. Commodities sold include aluminum, tin, cardboard, mixed paper, plastics, and glass. Glass collected through mixed recycling is typically challenging to sell. Due to the layout of the new sorting equipment that removes it early in the sorting process, Metro Waste Authority has developed a strong reputation for glass cutlet, consistently selling multiple loads per week.
- Overall, contamination rates are approximately 14%, very low compared to the national average of 29%. Contamination is mitigated through education as well as advanced equipment.



METRO RECYCLING FACILITY

- Debuting equipment new to the industry, the facility is successfully maintaining high processing time, employee safety, and reduced contamination. The initial material sort is handled by an auger, eliminating the need for employees to sort in an otherwise dangerous capacity and preventing material from wrapping in the equipment.
- Sustainable materials were integrated throughout the building. This includes refurbished computers once discarded, decorative items such as crushed glass embedded in the concrete lobby floor, chandeliers fashioned from reclaimed plastic bottles, and a mural incorporates reclaimed materials to spark conversation.
- Opening the facility created 20 new jobs in the metro. Positions receive a competitive compensation package, including paid time off and health benefits. In addition, considerable care was taken in planning for comfort. Natural light brightens the space where workers sort material. Enclosures around compressor units temper heat and cold during appropriate times of the year.

31

communities' single stream
recycling accepted



EDUCATION

Environmental education is one of Metro Waste Authority's key priorities. Because education is the first step to changing behavior, the agency takes a comprehensive approach to educate Central Iowans from pre-kindergarten to retirement.

- While the COVID-19 pandemic continued to disrupt lesson plans and shift education in 2021, Metro Waste Authority created programming that allowed for uninterrupted access to learning. Virtual field trips, interactive infographics with embedded live action video, and web-based live-streams made learning about diversion, waste management, and sustainability exciting and accessible for both educators and students.
- A new video segment called "Talking Trash" was introduced to highlight operational information in a fun and engaging way. On Facebook alone, the segments reached more than 36,000 people and viewed more than 22,000 times.
- Opened an education center for environmental learning at Metro Recycling Facility. The center features multipurpose space, an observation deck above the sorting floor, hands-on exhibits, and activities for visitors of all ages to learn about accepted recyclables and the recycling process.

- Metro Waste Authority partnered with Aspiring Professional Experience (APEX), through the Waukee School District, including students in the planning and design for the education center at the recycling facility. Through this year-long collaboration, the students gained exposure to professional project planning and decision making while sharing their ideas to shape the learning environment at the facility.
- The agency expanded our professional development workshop to the westside of the metro. Through the workshop, educators visited Walnut Creek to learn about ecosystem health, biodiversity, and the importance of watersheds. In addition to hands-on instruction, participating teachers received resources to assist them in lesson planning and facilitating river cleanups in their own districts.
- Education and Outreach Coordinator Sarah Borzo was a recipient of the Presidential Award for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching, the highest award that K-12 STEM educators can receive from the U.S. government. Sarah was recognized for cultivating curiosity and creating unique and engaging educational experiences in science.

11
virtual learning
experiences created



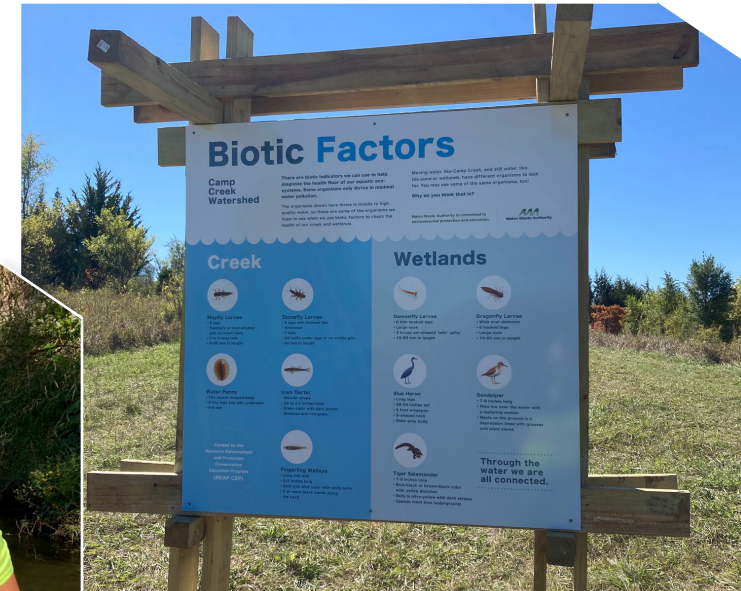
8,696
learners reached
through virtual
learning experiences



ENVIRONMENT

While Metro Waste Authority was originally formed to manage a landfill for the county, its role quickly evolved to managing waste from a holistic environmental perspective. To guide the agency's environmental efforts, Metro Waste Authority participates in the Environmental Management System (EMS) through the Iowa DNR. This is a voluntary program that provides a framework for solid waste organizations to set goals for environmental improvement.

- Significant changes to Iowa's Bottle Bill led the agency to start a can redemption service at Metro Hazardous Waste Drop-off to provide a convenient location for redemption and recycling of valuable aluminum and PET (plastic) material.
- The agency received \$3,106 in grant funding from the Iowa DNR to construct interactive kiosks that educate the community about Central Iowa's watersheds and waterways, share the importance of water quality, and offer instruction and a hands-on opportunity to test and monitor water quality. The kiosks will be installed at two Camp Creek watershed access points at the Environmental Learning Center for use by visiting classrooms and community groups.
- More than 50 miles of streams were adopted through the agency's Adopt A Stream program, which encourages community groups to adopt a section of stream in Polk County to keep clean. Groups are provided cleaning supplies for completing at least one clean-up event per year. Hundreds of pounds of garbage such as tires, vacuum cleaners, paper cups, and plastic film has been removed from waterways.



COMMUNITY

Metro Waste Authority was originally formed as a partnership between 16 member communities and one county. Today, that partnership is thriving, providing programs and services that support safe, smart waste disposal for more than 100,000 households in the metro.

- Metro Waste Authority has managed contracts for curbside collection of solid waste, recycling, and yard waste for 20 years. This year, for the first time, renewal of hauling contracts for all three services coincided. This afforded the agency an opportunity to streamline collection services and keep collection costs among some of the lowest in the country.
- Through a reimagined grant program, Metro Waste Authority provided two funding opportunities related to regional, environmental initiatives this year. The first provided more than 3,000 trees for planting, to help rebuild the metro's tree canopy. In the agency's second effort, grant dollars were awarded for the placement of five electric vehicle charging stations on municipal property.
- Recycling drop-offs are available in 16 metro communities, with five placed this year. Through the drop-offs, 668 tons of cardboard and 22 tons of glass was collected. Recycling drop-offs provide a free and convenient way to dispose of larger quantities or oversized pieces of cardboard. In addition, keeping material such as glass separate makes it more valuable for resale.



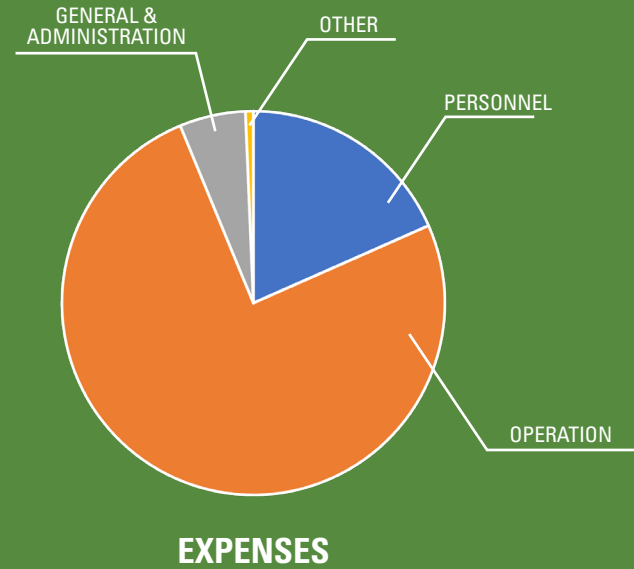
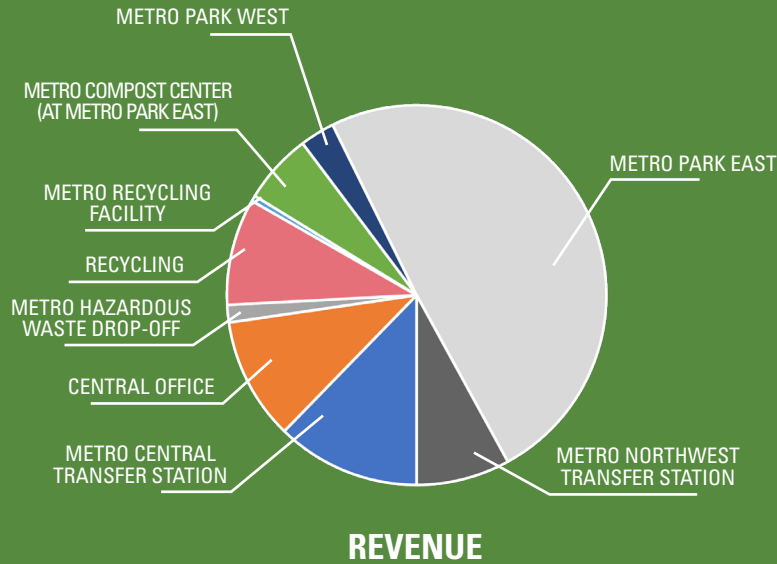
- When the pandemic disrupted the usual disposal option for Metropolitan Wastewater Reclamation Authority (WRA) produced biosolids, the agency contacted Metro Waste Authority about landfilling the material. Through a unique partnership, the two agencies came to the mutually beneficial solution of applying the nutrient-rich product to more than 100 acres of farmland owned by Metro Waste Authority, located adjacent to the landfill.
- A large, two-story mural, called "Look Where We Are Growing Together," was commissioned in the lobby of the new Metro Recycling Facility. Public art is a cornerstone of the agency's investment in the vitality of the metro and this latest piece is a unique and engaging way to spark discussions about recycling and its impact. A large mural and interactive metal sculpture adorn the exterior of the agency's Central Office in East Village Des Moines to show what is possible when "garbage" is reimagined into art.



41,605
customer care calls

157
outreach events

FINANCIALS



Metro Waste Authority is a 28E quasi-governmental agency. The organization's revenue is 100 percent generated by the fees from services, rather than from state or federal taxes. Metro Waste Authority is a fiscally-conservative organization that aims to reinvest revenue back into programs and services, as well as giving back to the communities it represents.



Metro Waste Authority

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