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Cass County Solid Waste Agency expanded their EMS pro-environmental message through signage and community events, heightening public awareness.

As part of their EMS new projects, Dubuque Metropolitan Area Solid Waste Agency held their first CFL - Compact Fluorescent Light - Recycling Event offering recycling at no charge for burned out CFLs that use 60% less energy.

Rathbun Area Solid Waste Agency's EMS program initiated their new school recycling program resulting in 12.14 tons recycled for the school year 2010-2011.

# New path to sustainability, cost savings

By Beverly Davis

From the high bluffs of Dubuque to the rolling prairies of Centerville, more than 200 Iowa communities have adopted the cutting edge Environmental Management System (EMS) as an alternative to the state's Solid Waste Comprehensive Planning that controls solid waste planning areas and permitted facilities.

Just as comfortable driving a Caterpillar 963 track loader as she is chatting up the Atlantic, IA Garden Club members on composting tips, Cass County's Environmental Control Director, Wendy Wittrock, is bullish on EMS after experiencing the limitations of comprehensive planning.

"We knew back in the 90s that the state's diversion system requiring an annual 25 percent waste reduction goal didn't make sense, especially for smaller communities. It wasn't fair and it didn't allow us to get credit for all the other good environmental programs and landfill management improvements that we were making."

Landfill managers have limited control over how much waste can be diverted from the landfill. What they can control and measure with EMS are the continual improvements they are making every day.

Cass County's EMS program included the Wood Chipper Project. The wood chipper was used by rural towns to ground tree limbs and brush, resulting in less open-air burning and improved air quality. "Just as long as you are making continuous improvements and measuring them, EMS gives us an opportunity to develop new programs and find better ways of doing what we've always done, which is protecting the environment and still providing the services our communities need," Wittrock says.

## EMS: Management Friend with Benefits

Unique in the nation, Iowa's volunteer EMS program uses specialized software that tracks and measures continuous improvements in six environmental areas – yard waste, household hazardous waste, water quality improvement, greenhouse gas reduction, recycling and environmental education – yielding better outcomes

and bigger cost-savings. EMS objectives are flexible. Each community develops activities and procedures based on their needs and challenges.

EMS benefits extend well beyond improved environmental compliance. DNR and the six EMS pilot solid waste agencies documented reduced environmental risks and employee accidents, increased operational efficiencies and conservation of natural resources, as well as improved employee morale. By opting into EMS, solid waste agencies can also opt out of some regulations and penalties.

"As sure fire ways to eke out continuous improvements while doing the right thing for the environment, Department of Natural Resources (DNR) helps solid waste agencies start an EMS program by providing fast start grants (\$20,000), free training and software, webinars and on-site consultants," says Brian Tormey, DNR Bureau Land Chief.

## Creating Results

According to early EMS adopter Tom Hadden, Executive Director of Metro Waste Authority (MWA), "In the EMS model, continuous improvement is not about hitting homeruns. It's about hitting singles every day, making those small continuous improvements that over the long haul add up to big efficiencies, which are also consistent with best environmental practices."

Metro Waste Authority's EMS program features a shingle-recycling project. The shingles are delivered and cleaned at their facility for any debris, metals and nails and then ground up and sold for use in hot mix asphalt. Result: 3,700 tons of shingles recycled, increased revenues and reduced environmental footprint.

"One of the outcomes of EMS is a better management system, so we can look for continuous improvements and know where improvements need to be made on a continual basis," says Roger Kaster, Rathbun Area Solid Waste Council Director. One EMS project for Rathbun included a school-recycling program. Results: recycling increased by 12.15 tons in 2010-2011.



The Waste Commission of Scott County's Electronic Demanufacturing Facility is an example of EMS offering residents environmentally sound e-waste disposal.



Instituting a 'No Idle' policy at the Dubuque landfill is another example of EMS projects that reduce the facility's carbon footprint and improves air quality.



DNR's new volunteer Environmental Management System (EMS) preserves Iowa's natural resources for future generations. (Pikes Peak State Park near MacGregor, IA)

As a direct result of their EMS program, the Scott County Waste Commission is the only public de-manufacturing e-waste facility in the nation to earn the R2 Certification - Responsible Recycling Certificate - promoting responsible practices throughout the electronics recycling industry. Result: 200 new business clients and 360 percent increase in business recycling in six months.

Marie DeVries, Contract Administrator for the Cedar Rapids/Linn County Solid Waste Agency says, "The difference between EMS and Comprehensive Planning is the difference between a crash diet and a change in lifestyle." Their EMS program included an energy audit resulting in a "No Idle" policy at all of their facilities. Result: Reduced carbon footprint, increased energy conservation and improved air quality.

### **New Recruits**

Iowa City recently joined the EMS ranks at the urging of Recycling Coordinator Jennifer Jordan. "We were always doing good stuff, but weren't documenting it properly. EMS will let us tie everything together. EMS permeates every level of environmental programming."

EMS requires quantifiable measurements and the paperwork can seem daunting to the newly initiated. All of the DNR support - and grant funding - are essential components to successfully launching and maintaining an EMS program.

"We're still in the process of establishing our goals and targets, which is a bit overwhelming at the moment," says Craig Poulsen, Assistant Public Works Director for Spencer, who expects their EMS program online next summer.

Laura Fiffick, DNR's pilot EMS consultant, recommends starting small, but you can't shortchange the metrics. "Measurement is probably one of the biggest pains of the system, but that's how you know you are doing better."

Based on continuous small improvements, EMS is the latest proven path to sustainability and greater cost-savings. Iowa's EMS proves that big things have small beginnings.

*Beverly Davis is a freelance reporter for the Metro Waste Authority. For more information on EMS visit [www.iowadnr.gov/InsideDNR/RegulatoryLand/SolidWaste/ComprehensivePlanning/SolidWasteEMS.aspx](http://www.iowadnr.gov/InsideDNR/RegulatoryLand/SolidWaste/ComprehensivePlanning/SolidWasteEMS.aspx) or contact Leslie Goldsmith at (515) 281-8499 or [Leslie.Goldsmith@dnr.iowa.gov](mailto:Leslie.Goldsmith@dnr.iowa.gov).*

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