

# Zero Waste in Action

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## Universal Recycling: Vermont, USA

### Summary

Vermont was the first US state to ban food waste from landfills, along with recyclable materials and yard debris. Trash haulers are required to provide curbside recycling and composting services to all residents and businesses.

### Population

627,000

### Year enacted

2012

### Who's affected

Households, Apartments, and Businesses

## Overview of Recycling Requirements

Vermont was the first US state to ban all food waste from landfills, as part of a package of phased-in landfill bans on major recyclable materials and yard debris. The state is requiring trash haulers and facilities to provide curbside recycling and composting services to all residents and businesses in phases over five years.

Known as the Act Relating to Establishing Universal Recycling of Solid Waste, this policy requires trash haulers to provide curbside recycling collection by 2015, yard debris and clean wood waste collection by 2016 and food waste collection by 2017. Municipalities are required to adopt pay-as-you-throw (PAYT) pricing structures to promote recycling by 2015. Residential recycling service is provided at no additional cost to residents (costs could be embedded in the total costs of trash services), but haulers are permitted to charge separately for organics collection from any generator and for recycling collection from businesses.

The state's landfill bans are being implemented in stages with recyclables banned in 2015, yard debris banned in 2016 and food scraps banned in 2017. This was designed to provide time to build the necessary infrastructure to meet the additional diversion.



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Recyclable materials banned from landfills include aluminum and steel cans, aluminum foil and aluminum pie plates, glass bottles and jars from foods and beverages, PET plastic bottles or jugs, HDPE plastic bottles and jugs, corrugated cardboard, white and colored paper, newspaper, magazines, catalogs, paper mail and envelopes, boxboard, and paper bags.

The bill rolls out the required food waste diversion from businesses based on size. Food manufacturers, colleges and other entities producing more than 104 tons of food waste per year were required to divert food scraps by 2014. Between 2014 and 2017, the law expands to include smaller food generators with lesser quantities (52 tons/year by 2015, 26 tons/year by 2016 and 18 tons/year by 2017). Facilities were exempt through 2014 if there was no composting facility within 20 miles. The bill does not mandate composting—only diversion—and promotes the hierarchy of food donation, animal feed and energy production before composting.

The goal of the universal recycling law is to create consistent statewide services, to offer convenient collection of recycling and compost alongside trash (parallel collection), and to make the program cost-effective through PAYT while not charging for residential recycling service.

## Background

Several factors led to the passage of the bill: Vermont had stagnated around a 30% recycling rate since 1994; the state estimated \$7.6 million in valuable recyclable or compostable materials were being thrown away every year; the state only had two landfills, one of which was nearing capacity when the policy was adopted. Previously Vermont considered legislation on producer responsibility for packaging and printed materials but the bill received mixed reviews from both industry and environmental groups.

Vermont has had a bottle bill since 1973 with a refundable deposit of 15 cents on liquor and spirits containers, and five cents on beer, wine coolers and other malt beverages, soft drinks and other carbonated beverages.

The Agency of Natural Resources, which oversees solid waste in the state, was tasked with revising the state's solid waste plan and reporting to the legislature on what is in the waste stream, the effectiveness of certain programs, the costs/benefits of expanding the beverage redemption program and single stream recycling, and several other issues.

## Implementation and Enforcement

Municipalities in Vermont are organized into solid waste districts and each district is responsible for creating a solid waste management plan that conforms to the state's existing solid waste management plan.



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There are no stated penalties in the law for not meeting the service requirements or for enforcing the landfill bans. Education and outreach are planned as the initial methods of enforcing Universal Recycling.

Public facilities led by example with schools, government buildings, airports and bus stations, and other publicly owned buildings providing recycling and having the number of recycling cans equal to the number of trash cans by 2012 for the state legislature and by 2015 elsewhere.

## Downloads

[Vermont Universal Recycling Law](#)

[Vermont Materials Management Plan, 2014](#)

[Moving toward Zero: From Waste Management to Resource Recovery, by Toxics Action Center](#)

[Agency for Natural Resources Report to the Legislature \(2008\)](#)

[Solid Waste Working Group Report to the Legislature \(2009\)](#)

## More information

[Vermont Waste Management Division](#)

[Vermont Beverage Container Deposit Law](#)

[Vermont Annual State Waste Generation and Diversion Reports](#)

[Gov. Shumlin Signs Universal Recycling Bill](#)

[Boston.com article: "Gov. Shumlin Signs Statewide Recycling Bill"](#)

[Resource Recycling article: "Vermont EPR Law Dies"](#)

[Vermont Public Radio report: "Bill Would Make Recycling Mandatory in Vermont"](#)



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