

2025 Recycling Excellence Award Winners

Council on Recycling

December 5, 2025

13 Years of Recycling Excellence

- Started in 2013 focused on Responsible Units
- Now local governments, non-profits, schools, and businesses all eligible to apply
- Nomination period opens in July; nominations due mid-Sept.
- Winners announced in conjunction with America Recycles Day (Nov. 15)
- Record number of nominations and winners this year
- Learn more at [Wisconsin Recycling Excellence Awards |](#) [Wisconsin DNR.](#)

Projects and Initiatives

Calumet County VFW Post 3153 (Chilton)

- Collected nearly 12,000 lbs. of plastic bags and film from various businesses, stores, homes, schools and the local library
- NextTrex provided composite plastic lumber benches



Projects and Initiatives

Dane County Department of Waste + Renewables

- After severe storms in fall 2024 and spring 2025, landfill inundated with shingles
- Reallocated staff, space and resources to recycle shingles vs landfill
- Shingles now #1 material diverted
- In 2021, the program recycled 3,200 tons of shingles; in 2025, it will exceed 30,000 tons!



Projects and Initiatives

Dane County Department of Waste + Renewables (2nd initiative)

- Launched a new food scrap collection program in spring 2025
- Installed 5 free, 24/7 residential drop-off kiosks known as "Food Scrap Stops" in 4 municipalities
- Already enrolled more than 1,700 households and diverted more than 140,000 pounds of food scraps from the landfill



Projects and Initiatives

Destination Door County

- Sustainable Hydration Initiative reduced plastic water bottles usage by encouraging and providing compostable cups and reusable bottles with water filling stations at various Door County events
- Prevented use of 5,548 plastic bottles at 28 festival events, dispensing over 50,000 ounces of water via compostable bamboo cups and reusable bottles



Projects and Initiatives

First United Methodist Church of Neenah-Menasha Green Team (Winnebago County)

- Eliminated Styrofoam and disposable cups during fellowship time and large events (replaced with reusable or compostable cups)
- Held a collection drives for lithium batteries, shoes, egg cartons, clothing, gift card recycling, Styrofoam recycling and more
- Established monthly “Green Tips” section in the church newsletter, dedicated bulletin board to eco-friendly ideas and interactive Earth Day displays



Projects and Initiatives

Milwaukee County Parks - Kosciuszko Community Center (Kozy)

- Sought to improve recycling
- “Recycling 101” training for staff
- Recycling included in new member orientation
- Purchased blue recycling bins with circular openings in the lids to help encourage the public to recycle and decrease contamination



Projects and Initiatives



Oshkosh Correctional Institution (Winnebago County)

- Started vermicomposting (worm composting) in 2004 with couple lbs. of worms
- Now 420 lbs. of worms fill 284 beds
- In one year, diverted ~57,600 lbs. of food waste via worms or horticulture compost piles
- Program also utilizes shredded paper, old t-shirts, blankets, egg and fruit crates, coffee and filters, sawdust and plastic containers (which are repurposed to sell worm castings)

Projects and Initiatives



Shorewood Elementary (Dane County)

- Uses share tables, recycles milk cartons, composts
- Last year, Shorewood's 2nd graders advocated to expand recycling opportunities
- Students developed a fundraising proposal and successfully purchased the school's first outdoor recycling bin

Projects and Initiatives

Sustain Dane (Dane County)

- In 2022, Sustain Dane identified a new mission to make food scrap collection more accessible to Madison community members
- Started coordinating food scrap collection and hauling to urban farm
- Expanded to be available at three Madison farmers' markets
- 2022 collected 10,764 lbs.; 2023, 19,754 lbs., surpassed goal of collecting 16,000 lbs. (weight of 2 adult hippos); 2024, 31,651 lbs., surpassed goal of collecting 22,000 lbs. (weight of 2 woolly mammoths); 2025 goal of collecting 40,000 lbs. (weight of 20 bison)



Projects and Initiatives

Tri-County Recycling (Brown, Outagamie, Winnebago Counties)

- Developed "Recycle Right Master Class"
- Courses include: 101 Curbside Recycling, 201 Beyond the Bin and 301 Recycling in Context
- To graduate, participants must also complete 10 hours of volunteer service within 6 months



Projects and Initiatives



Veolia Environmental Solutions and Services
(Waukesha County)

- Developed a gas cylinder recycling unit, designed for small and large cylinders alike (including the difficult-to-manage one-pound camp stove cylinders and larger)
- Cost-effective gas recovery system enables 100% recovery and recycling of end-of-life propane cylinders
- Remaining propane is repurposed and recovered and empty metal containers are crushed and sent off-site for reconditioning or recycling

Projects and Initiatives



Village of Bayside (Milwaukee County)

- Besides curbside recycling and yard waste collection, offer many special collections (electronics, scrap metal, bicycles, light bulbs, plastic bags, ink cartridges, eyeglasses, cell phones, textiles, HHW)
- Developed short YouTube videos on the do's and don'ts of recycling, yard waste and leaf collection
- Conducted month-long social media "Boot the Bag" campaign to motivate residents to eliminate use of plastic bags by promoting the adoption of reusable alternatives

Projects and Initiatives

Winsert, LLC (Marinette County)

- Conducts semi-annual "Universal Waste Collection for Recycling Day"
- Provides the opportunity for Winsert employees to properly dispose of their universal and electronic waste items from home
- This year alone, Winsert recycled a total of 3,570 lbs. of electronic waste; 220.64 lbs. of batteries; 210 light bulbs; 131.25 gallons of oil and 16 oil filters. Since the program's inception, over 10,000 lbs. of electronic and universal waste have been recycled.



Overall Program

Badger Prairie Needs Network (Dane County)

- Receives food donations from individuals, grocery stores and other retailers, food banks, large commercial kitchens, area farmers and local food drives
- Food is re-purposed to create a grocery store-style food pantry
- Offers free community meal 2 Saturdays/month
- On an annual basis, volunteers contribute ~4,500 hours to re-packaging food recovered from commercial kitchens and ~5,500 hours to picking up and sorting groceries donated by stores
- Food and food scraps unsuitable for guests go to a local livestock farmer for animal feed or are transported to a commercial composting facility



Overall Program

City of De Pere (Brown County)

- “Clean recycling” focus with workers touring MRF and cart tagging
- Added a QR code educational sticker to recycling carts
- Started plastic bag recycling program
- Goes above and beyond to reach children with recycling education. Drivers carry coloring books, activity books, toy recycling trucks and stickers in their trucks and hand them out whenever kids might be near during collection. Drivers visit schools several times a year to showcase the recycling trucks and talk about the importance of recycling.



Overall Program

Inpro Corporation (Waukesha County)

- Received a Zero Waste Program Certification through SCS Global Services for waste diversion from landfill of 63.99%
- Recycles wide range of materials, including PVC and ABS plastics, metals, cardboard, e-waste, wooden spools and pallets
- Partnerships with organizations like Fishiding turn PVC scrap into fish habitats
- Regrinds some PVC in-house to reuse in manufacturing the retainer for the BluNose Corner Guards, which are made from 100% pre-consumer recycled content and are four times stronger than the aluminum counterpart



Overall Program

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
(Milwaukee County)

- UWM's Office of Sustainability manages 32 distinct reuse, recycling and disposal streams, collectively saving the university approximately \$800,000-\$900,000 annually through avoided costs.
- In 2024, UWM recycled 156,076 lbs. of scrap metal; 118,381 lbs. of electronics; 576,135 lbs. of paper products; and 195,469 lbs. of organic waste (which includes 169,289 lbs. of food waste and 26,180 lbs. of yard waste)
- In spring 2025, UWM started a plastic film recycling program



Overall Program

WasteCap Resource Solutions (Milwaukee County)

- Non-profit organization that provides waste reduction and recycling assistance to businesses
- In the last 20 years, WasteCap has recycled more than 1.5 million tons of material
- Conducted Milwaukee's first Food Waste & Recovery Study
- Assisted with deconstruction of Milwaukee County Stadium, diverting 95% of materials from landfills, saving \$1.2 million
- “Waste is a resource in the wrong place”



Special Events

Riverfest Inc (La Crosse County)

- 4-day event with music, food, kid's activities over Independence Day holiday
- Since 2018, partnered with Hilltopper Refuse and Recycling to create a more sustainable event by recycling cardboard, aluminum and plastics #1, #2 and #5
- Event includes recycling education and signage visible to festival goers along with 65 clear recycling containers spread across the grounds
- 1st year Riverfest began offering recycling, 730 pounds of material was diverted. Since that time, participants, vendors and volunteers have kept over 7,320 pounds (3.66 tons) of materials out of the landfill



Special Events

3rd Annual Recycling Extravaganza/Robert Blaus,
Event Organizer (Oneida County)

- Community event provides the opportunity for residents to recycle, donate or properly dispose of a variety of materials
- Although the event was only held from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., 538 vehicles were in line before open, coming from surrounding counties and even the Upper Peninsula of Michigan
- Event collected electronics, metal, appliances, pharmaceuticals, eyeglasses, hearing aids, American flags, ink and toner cartridges, crayons, old gift and key cards, plastic bags/film and more
- Attendees encouraged to bring nonperishable items for local food pantry; received 883 lbs. of food and \$1,229 in donations from recyclers



Innovation

Bikes for Kids Wisconsin (Dane County)

- Began in 2017 with a goal to provide bikes to kids in need
- Diverted more than 14,135 bicycles from landfills (~318,000 lbs. of material) through refurbishment, while recycling another 108,000 pounds of non-repairable bicycle materials.
- Provides essential transportation to people in need in underserved communities across Wisconsin
- State's only comprehensive bicycle refurbishment and recycling program at this scale, prioritizing reuse over recycling



Innovation

Merrimac Community School (Sauk County)

- Uses school chickens to reduce its food waste from snack and lunch times
- Vegetable peelings, uneaten salad bar items, fruit and other suitable foods are sent to the chicken pen instead of the landfill
- In the mornings, students feed the chickens as a part of the care and responsibility routine. Buckets with food that would normally be thrown away are tipped into the pen
- This innovative program is not only reducing waste but educating the next generation of Wisconsinites about waste diversion



Honorable Mention

Town of Mentor (Clark County)

- Annual Clean Up Day May 17, 2025
- Collected furniture, scrap metal, tires, mattresses, bikes, rugs, lawnmowers, electronics and appliances
- Won a 2023 Recycling Excellence Award for the Special Events category



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OFF THE RECORD"