



# 2024 Dakota County Recycling Progress Report

## Introduction

Dakota County is committed to providing a healthy environment with quality natural areas that protects and maintains natural resources for the health and enjoyment of current and future residents.

Each year, the county publishes a Recycling Progress Report to inform residents on the progress made towards waste diversion and recycling. Dakota County’s programs and efforts are directed by the county’s 2018-2038 Solid Waste Master Plan to meet state requirements.

Most notably, Minnesota law requires all metropolitan counties to achieve a 75-percent recycling rate by 2030.

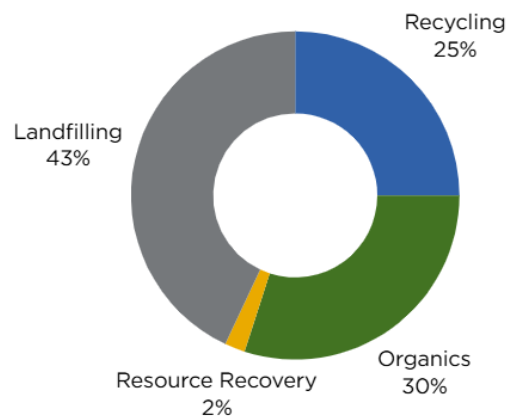
The county uses Minnesota’s waste management hierarchy to prioritize waste management. The hierarchy outlines most preferred management methods (waste reduction, reuse, recycling, composting) to the least preferred methods (controlled incineration and landfilling).



## Total waste generated

Around 518,221 tons of solid waste were generated in Dakota County in 2024. This includes recycling, organics (food scraps and yard waste) and trash from residents and businesses. This is less than a 1 percent increase from 2023.

2024 disposal rates



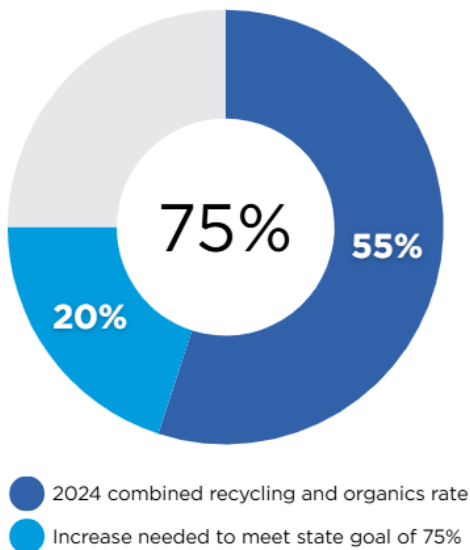


### Waste management method and percent change from 2023 to 2024

Management method	2023 (tons)	2024 (tons)	Percent change
Recycling	118,287	129,838	10-percent increase
Organics (food scraps and yard waste)	148,619	154,640	4-percent increase
Resource recovery	11,871	12,372	4-percent increase
Landfilling	228,069	221,372	3-percent decrease
<b>Total</b>	<b>506,846</b>	<b>518,221</b>	<b>2-percent increase</b>

### Progress towards state goal

To meet a 75-percent recycling rate (recycling and organics combined) by 2030, the combined recycling and organics rate needs to increase by 20-percent.





## 2024 highlights and major accomplishments

### Launched Recycling Exists campaign to increase confidence in recycling

The Recycling Exists campaign aims to dispel myths about recycling in the Twin Cities Metro Area and help the public feel more confident about its recycling system. The campaign is a partnership with other Twin Cities metro counties. To learn more about the campaign, visit [www.recyclingexists.com](http://www.recyclingexists.com).

### Offered Recycling Ambassador program for free

Dakota County removed the cost for the Recycling Ambassador class. This change is consistent with other metro county programs and helps reduce barriers to participation, making space more equitable for all Dakota County residents. Read more about the Recycling Ambassador program on page 9.

### Increased recycling in public spaces

Cities in Dakota County use county grant funding to add recycling containers to pair with trash containers in public spaces such as city parks, city halls and fire stations. This makes it easier to recycle at events in these spaces.

To date, cities have paired and labeled containers in 395 public spaces. The percentage of city parks and buildings with paired containers and proper signage has more than tripled over the past seven years, from 27 percent in 2018 to 91 percent in 2024. Learn more about the community waste abatement grant on page 6.

### Purchased property for new recycling and household hazardous waste drop-off facility

Dakota County purchased property in Lakeville to build the Recycling Zone Plus, a new household hazardous waste and recycling drop-off facility. The Recycling Zone Plus is a partnership with Scott County. It will accept similar materials as the existing Recycling Zone in Eagan, which will remain open after the proposed new facility opens. The goal is to open the new facility in 2027.

### Kept food scraps out of the trash at the Dakota County Fair

Dakota County's multiyear partnership with the County Fair has helped fair goers and vendors recycle right. This year, Dakota County helped food vendors collect their food scraps for composting. All 71 vendors received a food scraps guide and education about how to voluntarily collect their food scraps. All vendors who generated food scraps participated. Dakota County also lent 100 portable recycling containers to pair next to trash containers to make it easier for attendees to recycle.





## Progress on implementing the 2018-2038 Solid Waste Master Plan

Dakota County Environmental Resources has programs that help cities, residents, businesses, schools and the county manage waste according to the waste hierarchy and meet state requirements. The next section of this report highlights the county programs and their results.

### For residents

#### Waste reduction and reuse

##### Fix-It Clinics

At a Fix-It Clinic, volunteers help and teach residents to troubleshoot and repair broken items. These events help build community and skills and keep items like clothes, small appliances, lamps and more out of landfills.

- **Number of clinics:** 12 (one each month)
- **Number of volunteers:** 297
- **Number of participants:** 749 residents
- **Number of items brought to the clinics:** 1,192
- **Percent of items fixed onsite or shown how to fix later:** 83-percent
- **Pounds of items kept out of the landfill:** Nearly 5,293

##### Reuse at the Recycling Zone

The Reuse Zone is located at the Recycling Zone in Egan. When residents drop off items like paint and household cleaners, they are put on shelves at the Reuse Zone for residents to shop for free.

- **Weight of items reused by residents (pounds):** 470,783
- **Amount saved in county disposal costs:** \$287,178

##### Save the food challenge

Dakota County hosted the Save the Food Challenge to teach participants how to prevent food waste by making simple shifts in shopping, storing and preparing food. Preventing wasted food saves the water, energy and other resources that went into making and processing our food.

Participants tracked food that they could have eaten but did not. Each week, they submitted weights of how much food they wasted. In 2024,

- **Number of initial household signups:** 20
- **Amount of food waste that was reduced:** 3.48 pounds to 0.25 pounds
- **Pounds of food waste avoided:** 156



## Garden tool swap pilot

Dakota County hosted its first ever garden tool swap in April. Residents were invited to bring garden tools or yard decor to swap for new-to-them items. Residents swapped items like trowels, rakes, shovels, ceramic gnomes, planters and decorative lanterns.

- **Number of participants:** 37
- **Pounds of items swapped:** 167
- **Percent of items swapped:** 85-percent

## Recycling

### Recycling Guide

The county runs an online directory with local options for getting rid of unwanted items. Residents can use the Recycling Guide to look up hundreds of items to learn how to reuse, donate, recycle or dispose of them.

- **Number of searches:** 107,139
- **Number of first-time visitors:** 65,629

### Top 10 items searched:

- Furniture
- Mattresses and box springs
- Microwaves
- Carpet and padding
- Dehumidifiers and humidifiers
- Refrigerators
- CDs
- Shredded paper
- Concrete
- Treated wood

### Curbside mattress pickup

Dakota County collaborated with Certified Recycling in Burnsville to make mattress recycling and reuse more convenient for county residents.

The county promoted Certified Recycling's discounted price to pick up mattresses and box springs at the curb. Items in good condition were donated to Bridging, a nonprofit organization that helps people in need. The rest were taken apart so the materials could be made into new products.

- **Number of household pickups:** 261
- **Number of pickups at multiunit residential housing:** 45
- **Number of items collected:** 531 pieces, 13 tons
- **Number of items recycled:** 491
- **Number of items donated to Bridging:** 40



## Boat wrap recycling

Dakota County organized a seasonal collection for residents to drop off plastic boat wrap. The collected material was taken to a local manufacturer that makes film into new plastic products like construction-grade plastic film.

- **Amount of plastic boat wrap recycled (pounds):** Over 8,700 pounds

## Yard sign recycling

Dakota County offered free yard sign collection at the Western Service Center in Apple Valley. The signs dropped off by residents were taken to Choice Plastics, so the corrugated plastic and metal could be made into new materials. The metal stakes were brought to the Recycling Zone for scrap metal recycling.

- **Number of yard signs collected:** 1,225
- **Amount of yard signs collected (pounds):** Nearly 1,000

## Composting and yard waste

### Food scraps drop-off program

In partnership with cities, the county manages 11 drop-off locations for residential food scraps. Collected food scraps are composted at a commercial compost facility.

- **Number of new households in 2024:** 957
- **Total number of registered households:** 11,392
- **Amount of food scraps collected (tons):** 1,235

## Household hazardous waste

### Recycling Zone

The Recycling Zone in Eagan is a convenient location for residents to drop off household hazardous waste and other recyclable materials like electronics, tires and recyclables year-round. The Recycling Zone redirects these items to be disposed of, recycled or reused.

- **Number of vehicles through the Recycling Zone:** 69,289
- **Pounds of items dropped off:** 4,326,117

## Community Waste Abatement Program

Dakota County provides technical assistance and funding to 14 cities to implement solid waste programs to help residents reduce waste and recycle or compost challenging materials. Program highlights include:



## Community swaps and collections

- Organized 30 reuse activities including classes, presentations, tabling, swaps, and collections of reusable material.
- Community swaps
  - Athletic gear
  - Costumes
  - Craft supplies
  - Furniture
  - Gardening tools
  - Puzzles
  - Seasonal décor
  - Toys
  - Winter clothing

## Recycling and recycling education

- Educated more than 7,000 residents about recycling and waste reduction at 68 community events.
- City staff mailed articles on recycling, hazardous waste, organics, and reuse to all single-family and multifamily addresses, reaching 100 percent of households located in these communities.

## Recycling infrastructure

- Ensured city buildings and parks have recycling containers that are conveniently paired with trash containers and clearly labeled in more than 400 public spaces.

Read more about this program highlight on page 1.

## Community collections

Cities held 88 special collection events for residents keeping recyclable or reusable material from the landfill.

## Collection highlights

- **Paper shredding events:** 77 tons of shredded paper from 19 events
- **Mattresses collection events:** 28 tons of mattresses from 14 events
- **Pumpkin composting events:** 67 tons of pumpkins from 8 events after Halloween

## For rural residents

Dakota County also has programs to serve the and 12 townships and rural cities of Coates, Empire, Hampton, Miesville, New Tier, Randolph and Vermillion.

## Rural Solid Waste Abatement Program

Dakota County provides funding rural cities to implement solid waste abatement programs to help residents reduce waste and recycle or compost challenging materials.



## Recycling collection event

The county hosted a one-day recycling event for mattresses, tires, cardboard and confidential documents. Dakota County partnered with the Metropolitan Mosquito Control District to sponsor tire recycling, the county's Sentence-to-Service program for work crew assistance, and Dakota County's Fleet Management for event location and planning.

- **Number of participating households:** 123
- **Number of mattresses collected:** 59
- **Number of tires collected:** 546 tires
- **Pounds of cardboard and confidential documents:** 2,260

## Success story: Rural townships host their own clean-up events

Rural residents in Greenvale, Sciota and Waterford townships held two extra events for residents.

- **Amount of scrap metal collected:** nearly 5 tons
- **Number of mattresses collected:** 38
- **Number of tires collected:** 275
- **Pounds of confidential documents:** 1,200

## Agricultural film plastic recycling

Dakota County partnered with Revolution Company and two local farms to collect agriculture film plastic in the spring and fall. Farmers could drop off plastic to Elmegca Farm in Douglas Township and Square Deal Dairy in Hampton Township. Revolution Company recycled the plastic into new items.

Farmers dropped off 9,980 pounds of agricultural film in 2024. Nearly 175,000 pounds of silage bags, bunker covers and greenhouse film have been kept out of the landfill since the program started.

## Rural newsletter

Each year, the county puts together the Healthy Rural Living newsletter for rural residents. The newsletter contains articles about waste reduction, recycling and composting and more. This newsletter was mailed all 6,300 rural households in the county.

The newsletter is a collaborative outreach effort between the Environmental Resources Department, Vermillion River Watershed Joint Powers Organization, Dakota County Soil & Water Conservation District and North Cannon River Watershed Management Organization to provide environmental outreach that is relevant to rural communities.

## Healthy Rural Living



Use this resource for information and advice on recycling, waste reduction and conservation practices in Dakota County.





## Recycling Ambassador program

The Recycling Ambassador program trains participants on waste reduction, recycling, composting and solid waste. Throughout six classes (one each week), residents take a deep dive into these subjects and how to communicate them to their peers and communities. The mission is to bridge the gap between awareness and action by motivating people to reduce waste in their homes and workplaces.

Classes are usually held twice each year, in spring and fall. Due to staffing changes this year, only one class was held in the spring. The spring 2024 class had 24 graduates.

After graduating, ambassadors become certified in the program after volunteering for 30 hours.

- **Number of 2024 graduates certified:** 3
- **Number of previous year-graduates certified:** 11
- **Number of hours volunteered:** 867
- **Number of residents engaged:** 5,621

To learn more about the 2024 successes, read the [2024 Recycling Ambassador report](#).

## For multiunit residential properties

The county's multiunit recycling program provides technical assistance and funding up to \$10,000 to support recycling improvements in multiunit buildings like apartments, condominiums, townhomes and independent senior living. The county partners with cities to help promote and implement the program.

### 2024 highlights

- Improved recycling at 41 multiunit residential properties.
  - Two-thirds of which were low-income housing.
- City staff provided recycling education to at 860 multiunit properties.
- Provided 1,355 reusable tote bags for residents to help bring their recyclables
- Cities mailed recycling information (and other waste management topics) to 100-percent of multiunit addresses.

### Success story: CDA tabling

The county collaborated with the county's Community Development Agency (CDA), Libraries, Parks and Career Force to host resource fairs at 25 Workforce Family Housing neighborhoods. County staff and county-trained Recycling Ambassadors provided recycling activities, education and resources reaching more than 500 residents at CDA multiunit properties.



## For businesses

The county's business recycling program provides businesses and non-profits technical assistance and funding up to \$10,000 to implement waste reduction and recycling activities, including organics recovery.

### 2024 highlights

- Served 72 businesses across a wide range of industries
- Helped businesses secure more than \$80,750 in funding to support waste reduction, reuse and recycling initiatives like recycling containers, signage and labels, reusable service ware and employee education.

#### Success story: Businesses choose to reuse

The county supported 7 waste-reduction projects for businesses. These projects helped businesses prevent food waste and avoid single-use disposable items. The program helped fund:

- A refrigerator to help keep donated food fresh at a food shelf.
- Reusable pallet wraps to avoid single-use disposal plastic wrap.
- Dishwashers to wash reusable silverware.
- Reusable dishware to replace single-use disposal silverware.

#### Very small quantity generator program

This program is set up to help businesses safely dispose of small amounts of hazardous waste at the Recycling Zone.

- **Number of participating businesses:** Over 345
- **Pounds of hazardous materials disposed:** Over 102,314

## For schools

The county's school recycling program provides technical assistance and funding up to \$10,000 to support recycling improvements in private and public schools. Fifty-five percent of K-12 schools in the county have participated in the program.

### 2024 highlights

- Improved recycling infrastructure at 10 schools (including outdoor recycling at 2 schools).
- Rented buses for 150 students to tour waste facilities (recycling, landfill and compost).
- Provided 8 recycling education performances for K-3 students.
- Provided free compost to 17 schools (total of 64 cubic yards).

#### Success story: 10<sup>th</sup> annual school recycling workshop



For 10 years, the county has offered a workshop to educate and motivate school staff to improve waste reduction and recycling at their schools. This year, 78 school staff attended the workshop.

## County operations

Dakota County buildings and parks continued recycling improvements through its internal recycling program.

- Collected nearly 570 tons of recyclables.
- Ensured all recycling and trash containers, inside and outside remained paired and labeled.
- Provided standardized recycling education to all county employees.
- Integrated recycling education into mandatory new employee training.
- Trained housekeeping contractors on recycling procedures and best waste management practices.
- Purchased recycled-content paper to support recycling markets.

## Regulatory initiatives

### Dakota County Solid Waste Management Ordinance (Ordinance 110)

Ordinance 110 revisions were adopted in 2019 to accomplish the regulatory strategies in the Solid Waste Master Plan and support managing waste according to the waste management hierarchy.

Ordinance 110 requires everyone in the county to recycle. In addition, businesses need to:

- Pair every trash bin with a recycling container
- Label all trash, recycling and organics (food scraps) containers
- Provide recycling education to employees

### New 2024 requirements

Effective January 1, 2024, organics (food scraps) collection was required for large commercial organic generators, including businesses and schools.

Learn more about solid waste requirements in the county.

## Compliance and outreach

County staff continued to follow its Ordinance 110 implementation plan, prioritizing outreach to businesses with the largest opportunities to help the county make progress towards the 75 percent recycling rate goal. Compliance staff also offered recycling education at hazardous waste inspections.

- **Number of businesses inspected:** 70
- **Number of hazardous waste inspections:** 309



## 2024-2044 Solid Waste Management Plan

Every six years, metropolitan counties are required to update its solid waste management plans. Each update must follow the state's direction for how waste is managed. The state's waste management direction is outlined in the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency's Metropolitan Solid Waste Management Plan.

After several rounds of stakeholder engagement, the county finalized its 2024-2044 Solid Waste Management Plan and submitted it to the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency for review. Visit the [solid waste management plan](#) page for more information about the project.