



# MIDDLESEX COUNTY IMPROVEMENT AUTHORITY

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### **Statistics shows Garden Staters recycling less today than in the 90s, Middlesex County rates stable**

**MIDDLESEX COUNTY** – Despite the recently released statistics that indicate New Jersey’s residents are recycling less today than they did in the 1990s, a few Counties are bucking that trend.

One such location is Middlesex County, where residents continue to meet the state’s recycling standards year after year and have maintained a steady rate for nearly two decades.

In 1987, New Jersey became the first state in the U.S. to legally mandate residential recycling programs. By 1995, legislators required Counties to recycle at least 60 percent of their total generated waste stream. Since then, Middlesex County has exceeded that benchmark 13 times, with the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection’s (NJDEP) most recent available data pointing to a 62.8 percent recycling rate in 2009. That same year, Middlesex was only one of four Counties – joined by Cumberland, Essex and Ocean Counties – to meet the requirements, according to the NJDEP’s web site.

“In addition to serving 14 municipalities with curbside collection, we provide an extensive informational guide to these residents each year,” said Middlesex County Improvement Authority’s (MCIA) Recycling Division Manager Ed Windas. “We use other forums to spread our message, like our educational recycling robot, M.C. Blue, a frequent and familiar face at municipal events, local fairs and area schools. We’re also fortunate to see a substantial increase in our schools’ recycling participation and that’s probably one of the reason we’re doing so well.”

But aside from outreach efforts and operational details, there may be other contributing factors to a County’s recycling statistics, Windas explained.

Some of the declining rates for recyclable materials are driven by industry and consumer-driven.

For instance, the state’s newspaper recycling rate has fallen from approximately 446,000 tons in 2000 to about 301,000 tons in 2009. This is the result of fewer residents buying newspapers and turning to other online sources for their information, Windas said. Similarly, the aluminum recycling rate has decreased by approximately 4,000 tons in that same time frame; not because residents are recycling less, but because producers have scaled back on the weight of the product.

“It used to take 27 aluminum cans to make a pound, but because it’s gotten thinner over the years, now it takes 33,” Windas said. “This is nothing germane to Middlesex County; you’ll find this across the state. There’s a big market shift to plastic and let’s face it, there’s less products out there in the world.”

Still, one factor remains key to recycling rates.

“I don’t want to take away from the fact that a successful program is fueled by its participation, and our residents are doing an incredible job of that,” Windas said.

Residents are an integral part of Middlesex County’s Recycling Program, both of which have been credited with diverting more than 500,000 tons of Class A recyclables from area landfills over the past 17 years, Windas said. By the NJDEP’s definition, Class A recyclables consist of glass, aluminum, steel, plastic containers, newspaper, mixed paper and corrugated cardboard, among other items.

While recycling is beneficial to the environment, Windas likes to remind residents that as tax payers, it’s also beneficial to their bottom line.

“There’s marketing revenue derived from materials picked up at the curb,” he said. “Some towns reinvest those funds into the recycling program. In the Middlesex County Improvement Authority’s case, we use that marketing revenue to subsidize each town’s recycling cost by 25 percent.”

The MCIA’s continued success is also due, in part, to its partnership with the Middlesex County Division of Solid Waste and Management, which operates several recycling programs that deal in paint, electronics, household hazardous waste and paper shredding.

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