

eco-cycle[®]

Working to Build Zero Waste Communities

2009

Annual Report

Eco-Cycle®

2009 ANNUAL REPORT

MISSION STATEMENT

Eco-Cycle's® mission is to identify, explore and demonstrate the emerging frontiers of sustainable resource management through the concepts and practices of Zero Waste. We believe in individual and community action to transform society's throw-away ethic into environmentally-responsible stewardship. We are partnering with businesses, municipalities, schools and individuals to create a Zero Waste community and to provide a Zero Waste model for the rest of the world.

HISTORY

Eco-Cycle® was founded in 1976 by local activists who were concerned with the amount of resources needlessly going to waste in landfills. They launched Eco-Cycle to create an opportunity for Boulder residents to preserve resources. Eco-Cycle school buses loaded with volunteers rumbled through neighborhoods to pick up recyclable materials, making Boulder one of the first communities in the nation to implement curbside recycling. Now one of the oldest and largest nonprofit recyclers in the United States, Eco-Cycle has broadened its efforts—both locally and internationally—to pioneer the next revolution in resource conservation: Zero Waste. Zero Waste replaces our current one-way system of resource exploitation, pollution and landfilling with a cyclical system in which better design, reuse, composting and recycling prevent environmental degradation.

AWARDS

Eco-Cycle® has received many awards over the past 33 years, and as Zero Waste becomes more mainstream, Eco-Cycle's work has been increasingly recognized locally and in the larger environmental community. The organization's Green Star Schools program received the *Best New Program Award* from the Colorado Alliance for Environmental Education; Eco-Cycle's Zero Waste Business Services program was awarded a *Gold Medal of Honor* by the Colorado Sustainable Business Awards and an *IQ (Innovation Quotient) Award* by the Boulder County Business Report; Eco-Cycle's Zero Waste Event Kit program was recognized by both the EPA's *Environmental Achievement Award* and the National Recycling Coalition's *Outstanding Recycling Innovation Award*; and it was an honor for Eco-Cycle to be voted the best nonprofit organization by Boulder County for the Boulder Camera's *Gold People's Choice* awards. Most recently, Eco-Cycle received *Yellowscene* magazine's *Best of the West Award*.

CONTRIBUTIONS

Eco-Cycle® is the largest community recycling social enterprise in the United States. The organization receives funding from individual contributions, corporate sponsorship and grants from private foundations. Other funding sources include the sale of recycled materials, fees for services and contracts with municipalities. All funds are used to advance recycling efforts and Zero Waste programs in the schools, businesses and communities Eco-Cycle serves.

PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES

RECYCLING PROCESSING: KEEPING RESOURCES IN THE PRODUCTION CYCLE

Since its inception in 1976, Eco-Cycle® has been Boulder County's recycling processor, and since 2001 Eco-Cycle has operated the Boulder County Recycling Center. Eco-Cycle processes recyclables from the drop-off centers it services in Boulder County, as well as from residential curbside programs, businesses, government offices and schools. In 2009, Eco-Cycle processed and marketed 57,000 tons of traditional recyclable materials, including glass, aluminum, steel, newspaper, white and colored paper, junk mail, magazines, catalogs, envelopes, phone books, corrugated cardboard, milk cartons and drink boxes, paperboard boxes, plastic bottles, plastic tubs and scrap metal, which saved the greenhouse gas equivalent of taking nearly 20,000 cars off the road for a year. By recycling instead of landfilling these materials, Eco-Cycle created 66 local jobs and helped our community avoid 550 tons of air pollution, 3.3 tons of water pollution, 135 tons of toxic herbicides, and 57,331 tons of toxic substances that threaten human health such as carcinogens, particulate matter and volatile organic compounds. The Boulder County Recycling Center operated using a single-stream sort system in 2009, which allows recyclers to mix their paper and containers together in one bin and increased the amount of materials recycled by the community by 13,000 tons compared to 2008.



CENTER FOR HARD-TO-RECYCLE MATERIALS: RECOVERING NEW MATERIALS



In November of 2001, Eco-Cycle® opened the Center for Hard-to-Recycle Materials (CHaRM), the first center of its kind in the nation. Today, the facility is still one of only three in the nation, but Eco-Cycle has created a concept that others are now discussing. The CHaRM accepts materials such as computers, printers, TVs, cell phones, books, textiles, block foam packaging (Styrofoam®), durable #2 plastics, used cooking oil, porcelain sinks and toilets, fire extinguishers and plastic bags. Each year, Eco-Cycle adds at least one new material to this list. Recently added materials include bikes and bike parts, tires and tubes. Through the CHaRM, Eco-Cycle is ensuring that non-traditional recyclables are processed responsibly in the U.S. and that these valuable resources are staying in production. Last year, the facility recycled more than 1.1 million pounds of electronics, 40 trailers full of block foam, 3.9 million plastic bags and 100,000 pounds of paper from books not suitable for reuse.

REUSE: PROMOTING THE MOST EFFICIENT RESOURCE USE

Reuse is a primary tenet of Zero Waste, and Eco-Cycle® promotes and facilitates the reuse of materials whenever possible. For each type of material collected for recycling at the CHaRM, Eco-Cycle works to add a reuse component. Newer computer equipment is repurposed through two nonprofits: the Jared Polis Foundation Community Computer Connection (C3) program, which refurbishes and distributes them to underserved children throughout Colorado, and Boulder Community Computers, dedicated to teaching Boulder area residents how to

build their own low-cost computers and use open-source software. Programs are also in place to glean reusable bikes and bike parts, books, cell phones, printer cartridges and microwave ovens from materials collected at the facility. Through the CHaRM, Eco-Cycle also collects over 80,000 pounds of textiles and shoes annually, which are sent to African communities for reuse or made into “wiper” rags.

Every year, Eco-Cycle receives thousands of used books through special collection events, the Boulder Valley School District and the CHaRM. Many of these books are in good condition and can be reused. In 2009, Eco-Cycle sorted and distributed 19,250 used children’s books to at-risk, low income and underserved children through 27 charitable organizations throughout Boulder County and other communities, including free or low cost health clinics, social service agencies, education centers, homeless shelters and other nonprofits.



To help facilitate reuse between individuals and to provide a community clearinghouse of reuse options, Eco-Cycle launched Eco-Cycle® Exchange in 2006. The online Exchange offers community members the opportunity to post and browse listings at no cost for free, quality reusable items. Eco-Cycle® Exchange now has more than 600 members, and in 2009 the site averaged 3,300 visits per month. Since its launch, the site has facilitated more than 153 successful exchanges of a wide variety of items, such as used building materials, appliances, electronics, sports equipment, furniture, office supplies and plants, and more than 11,415 pounds of materials have been kept in productive use and out of the landfill.

BUSINESSES: CHANGING THE WAY BUSINESS IS DONE

Eco-Cycle® provides recycling services to more than 700 Boulder and Broomfield County businesses and organizations, including offices, schools, florists, restaurants, hotels, printers and manufacturers. The program collects traditional recyclables, as well as compostable materials, such as food waste, non-recyclable paper and biodegradable foodservice products. Eco-Cycle also provides collection of hard-to-recycle materials including electronics, books, plastic stretch wrap and other materials. In 2009, Eco-Cycle designed a new commercial program for hard-to-recycle collection and processing at the CHaRM. Throughout the year, more than 15 area businesses signed up for Eco-Cycle’s CHaRM on the Road program and participated in customized trainings, marketing and collections offered through this program.



For the past four years, Eco-Cycle has offered a unique Zero Waste Services package to businesses. This program is helping businesses keep 90% or more of the discards they produce out of landfills and offers a new approach to resource management and environmental sustainability. More than 60 large corporations, hotels, restaurants, offices and other businesses are working with Eco-Cycle to reduce the amount of trash they create and increase their diversion from the landfill through recycling, composting and Zero Waste purchasing decisions. In 2009, 45 new businesses signed up for the comprehensive, groundbreaking Zero Waste Services program. Eco-Cycle’s

work to help businesses recycle and compost materials rather than disposing of them in landfills prevented 13,461 metric tons carbon dioxide, the equivalent of saving 1.5 million gallons of gasoline.

On Earth Day in 2009, Eco-Cycle hosted the annual Zero Waste Community Partners Business Awards. Three categories of businesses were honored with the awards: Large Corporation, Small Business and Bar/Restaurant. In conjunction with the event, Eco-Cycle created six videos highlighting the Zero Waste practices of the top two businesses in each category. The videos were posted on Eco-Cycle's website for the community to view and vote for the best Zero Waste business in each category.



COMMUNITY OUTREACH: EDUCATING AND INSPIRING OUR COMMUNITY

Eco-Cycle® provides a wide variety of community education services, publications and activities to promote waste reduction, encourage recycling and composting, and advance our community's—and the nation's—progress toward Zero Waste. In 2009, Eco-Cycle answered an average of 1,500 phone questions each month and gave 54 presentations and recycling facility tours to community groups. Eco-Cycle also published several print pieces on a variety of topics including 68,000 copies of the *Eco-Cycle Times* newsletter, *Who is Eco-Cycle?* (an informational brochure about the organization), 29,000 single-stream recycling guidelines, including the Dirty Dozen worst contaminants, which were inserted in the *Boulder Camera*, and an updated *Junk Mail* brochure for distribution at events and as an online guide. The new information in this guide to reducing junk mail prompted Stonyfield Farms dairy company to feature Eco-Cycle's website and junk mail information on the lids of their yogurt containers. Near the end of 2009, Eco-Cycle updated and published 57,000 copies of the annual *Holiday Guide*, which was inserted in the *Boulder Camera* and *Longmont Times-Call* and distributed at events and businesses throughout Boulder County. This guide to holiday waste reduction prompted many media interviews both locally and nationally, including an interview with Martha Stewart Living radio.



In addition, the organization's website provided useful information and tools to 885,585 visitors. As many as 25% of website visitors were from outside the U.S. and Canada. In 2009, Eco-Cycle sent 13 email newsletters or alerts to 28,103 supporters and customers about recycling events, educational workshops and volunteer opportunities. These electronic communications often included "viral"

videos and educational "ads" for recipients to share with their social media networks. Eco-Cycle also joined the social media movement, launching Facebook and Twitter pages in 2009.

A critical element of Eco-Cycle's outreach and education is our work to make community and private events Zero Waste. At a Zero Waste event, the discards produced are either compostable or recyclable, eliminating (or substantially reducing) the need for trash bins. In 2009, Eco-Cycle educated 133,650 people at 25 large Zero Waste events throughout the community, such as festivals and triathlons, keeping an average of 88% of event discards and more than 226,000 pounds of resources out of the landfill through composting and recycling. These efforts conserved 21,000 gallons of gasoline, avoided more than 3,000 pounds of air and water pollution, and saved the greenhouse gas equivalent of taking 39 cars off the road for a year. Eco-Cycle also trained and consulted for more than 30 mid-sized events that used our program to run their own Zero Waste events. Eco-Cycle also continued its Zero Waste efforts at the Boulder and Longmont Farmers' Markets. Over the course of the market



season, nearly 500,000 market shoppers experienced Zero Waste in action while supporting local farmers and vendors. Eco-Cycle is also helping individuals make their own events waste-free with customized Zero Waste Event Kits, which include everything needed to throw a Zero Waste party or meeting, such as compost bins, compostable tableware and educational signage. In 2009, the kit was purchased for use at 306 small to medium-sized events such as corporate meetings, weddings and backyard barbecues.



Protecting our environment and working toward Zero Waste must involve all sectors of our community. As our local Latino population grows, it becomes increasingly important to meet the needs of this community and provide education about the benefits of reducing waste, recycling, and decreasing the amount of materials sent to the landfill. In 2009, Eco-Cycle created a variety of multimedia outreach tools in Spanish, including videos, PSAs, and *Reciclamos en Longmont* (a brochure in Spanish about single-stream recycling in Longmont). Spanish-speaking volunteers were also recruited for a door-to-door outreach campaign in a Latino neighborhood in Longmont. As a result of Eco-Cycle's Latino Outreach program, recycling participation rates tripled in the targeted neighborhood.

Eco-Cycle's Eco-Leader network of volunteers plays a significant role in our outreach and education efforts. This group of 844 dedicated recyclers donated close to 3,602 hours of their time in 2009 to help Eco-Cycle distribute the biannual *Eco-Cycle Times*, provide Zero Waste services at events, staff special recycling collections, answer questions at recycling drop-off centers, assist with administrative tasks, and promote political change in our community.

SCHOOLS: TEACHING THE NEXT GENERATION

Since 1987, Eco-Cycle® has coordinated the Boulder/Broomfield County School Recycling and Environmental Education Program, which integrates environmental education with established school curriculum, ensuring that students in Boulder and Broomfield Counties learn about their environment and what they can do to care for it. The program provides for the collection of recyclables from all 55,000 students and staff in 82 Boulder Valley and St. Vrain Valley public schools. Annually, Eco-Cycle educators give 1,400 environmental education presentations on a wide variety of topics, such as waste reduction, recycling, litter prevention, composting, household hazardous waste, air quality, indoor air quality, forest ecology and energy conservation, to more than 40,000 kindergarten through 12th grade students in Boulder and Broomfield County classrooms.

Eco-Cycle is taking the next step in environmental education with its Green Star Schools program. Through this first-in-the-nation Zero Waste program, Eco-Cycle works with schools to address every aspect of their waste stream, making Zero Waste an integral part of their daily routine. In 2009, students and staff at 21 Green Star Schools composted non-recyclable paper and food scraps from their cafeterias and classrooms, reducing their trash by one-third. These schools diverted another one-third of their waste from the landfill through recycling and other waste reduction practices.



CHANGING THE RULES: ENCOURAGING ZERO WASTE POLICIES



In order to create a Zero Waste Community, our political rules must be changed to promote resource conservation and recovery. Eco-Cycle® is working with local municipalities to create Zero Waste policies for all government activities, as well as Zero Waste systems and practices for residents and businesses. In 2009, the city of Louisville was among the first communities in the nation to go from virtually no curbside recycling to a full, city-sponsored curbside recycling and composting program for all residents. Eco-Cycle advised the community group and city staff on this critical change, which built on the success of the universal curbside recycling program very recently implemented in the neighboring city of Lafayette.

ECO-CYCLE® INTERNATIONAL: PROVIDING A MODEL FOR ZERO WASTE

Eco-Cycle® International (Eco-I) was created to spread the concept of Zero Waste to other communities, help them implement specific Zero Waste rules, build Zero Waste infrastructure, and create local Zero Waste economies. Through the Eco-I program, Eco-Cycle staff serve as Zero Waste speakers for national conferences and consultants for communities in Colorado, around the U.S., and abroad.

Eco-Cycle is also providing model programs for others to emulate and is using multimedia materials to showcase these programs. In 2009, Eco-Cycle distributed 27 copies of the organization's *Zero Waste Systems* video around the globe, created a "how to" video that outlines Eco-Cycle's Latino Outreach program in Longmont as a guide for other education programs serving Latino populations, and launched the Eco-Cycle Media page on the organization's website where other communities can purchase Eco-Cycle educational materials that can be adapted for their own use. Eco-Cycle also interviewed James Hansen (head of the NASA Goddard Institute for Space Studies and a lead researcher and authority in the field of climatology) about climate change and the effects of methane released from landfills and other sources. In addition, Eco-Cycle videoed Josh Tickell, a professional speaker, author, filmmaker and alternative fuels enthusiast. These interviews will be included in future feature-length videos and as stand-alone videos aired on the organization's website. Eco-Cycle staff members were interviewed themselves and will appear in *Bag It!*, a feature-length film on the environmental impacts of plastic bag use in the U.S.



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