

# Get on the *Expressway* to Zero Waste



2010

Annual Report

**eco-cycle**<sup>®</sup>  
Working to Build Zero Waste Communities

# Eco-Cycle®

## 2010 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 35 years, and our model Zero Waste programs have received recognition locally and in the larger environmental community. In 2010, Eco-Cycle received the *One World Award* from Boulder Rotary Club.

### ORGANIZATIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

Eco-Cycle employed 56 full-time and 6 part-time employees in 2010, many of whom have been with the company for more than a decade. In collaboration with the nonprofit Imagine!, Eco-Cycle also provided employment opportunities for eight adults with developmental delays and cognitive disabilities through our book shearing/recycling program.

### CONTRIBUTIONS

Eco-Cycle® is the largest community recycling nonprofit social enterprise in the United States. The organization solicits and receives funding from individual contributions, corporate sponsorship and grants from private foundations and governmental agencies. Other funding sources include the sale of recycled materials, fees for services and contracts with municipalities. All funds are used to advance recycling 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 2010, Eco-Cycle processed and marketed more than 55,000 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 prevented 135,920 metric tons of carbon dioxide (MTCO<sub>2</sub>e) and saved the greenhouse gas equivalent of taking nearly 26,000 cars off the road for a year.\* By recycling instead of landfilling these materials, Eco-Cycle created 70 local jobs and helped our community avoid 551 tons of air pollution, 2.2 tons of water pollution, 146 tons of toxic herbicides, and 67,614 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 2010, which allows recyclers to mix their paper and containers together in one bin. This system increased the amount of residential materials recycled by nearly 8,000 tons compared to 2009.



\*Calculations based on the environmental benefits calculator provided courtesy of Jeffrey Morris, PhD. at Sound Resource Management.

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

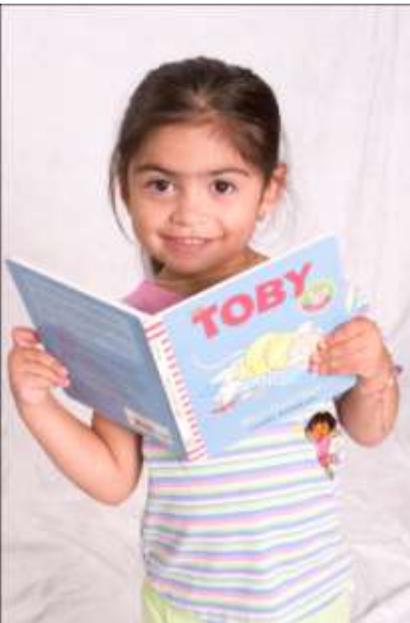


In November of 2001, Eco-Cycle® opened the Center for Hard-to-Recycle Materials (CHaRM), the first center of its kind in the nation. Today, the facility has been emulated by three other U.S. communities, and the CHaRM serves as a model that others are striving for with their own facilities and drop-off events. The CHaRM accepts a wide range of materials including 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, and yoga mats. 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.

In 2010, 23,244 recyclers visited the CHaRM, and the facility processed 1 million pounds of electronics, 40 trailers full of block foam, more than 4 million plastic bags, 22,500 pounds of porcelain, 9,600 bike tires and 137,503 pounds of paper from books not suitable for reuse. By recycling such vast volumes and variety of materials through the CHaRM last year, Eco-Cycle prevented 1,800 metric tons of carbon dioxide (MTCO<sub>2</sub>e), the equivalent of conserving 204,000 gallons of gasoline.

## 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 Community Computer Connection (C3) program, which refurbishes and distributes them to underserved children throughout Colorado, and Boulder Community Computers, which teaches 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 56,000 pounds of textiles and shoes annually, which are sent to African communities for reuse or made into “wiper” rags locally.



Every year, Eco-Cycle receives thousands of used books through special collection events, the Boulder Valley and St. Vrain Valley School Districts, and the CHaRM. Many of these books are in good condition and can be reused. In 2010, Eco-Cycle sorted and distributed approximately 16,000 used children’s books to at-risk, low income and underserved children through 30 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. Used books were also distributed to Eco-Cycle’s Green Star Schools for trash-free fundraisers (selling the books), to build classroom libraries, and for use as student awards and incentives.

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 800 members, and since its launch the site has facilitated more than 161 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 12,536 pounds of materials have been kept in productive use and out of the landfill.

## BUSINESSES: MAKING ZERO WASTE THE NEW BUSINESS MODEL

For the past five 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 65 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 2010, six new businesses signed up for the comprehensive, groundbreaking Zero Waste Services program.



## BUSINESSES (CONTINUED):



Many businesses also participated in customized education, trainings, marketing and promotions offered through our Zero Waste Services program in order to increase their compost and recycling, decrease waste, promote employee participation and spread the word about their sustainability practices.

Eco-Cycle® also provides recycling services to more than 750 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. In 2010, Eco-Cycle's Zero Waste Services Program recovered 23,530,605 pounds of single-stream recyclables and 6,576,928 pounds of compostables, a total of over 30.1 million pounds of materials.\*

In addition, Eco-Cycle provides regular collection of hard-to-recycle materials including electronics, books, plastic stretch wrap and other materials through the CHaRM on the Road program. In 2010, four additional area businesses signed up for this service.

\*Calculations based on the EPA's Waste Reduction Model (WARM).

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

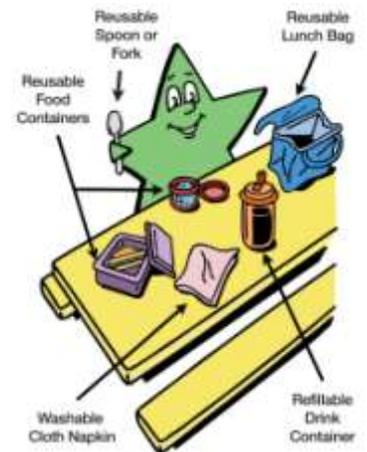
Eco-Cycle® International (Eco-I) was created to spread the concept of Zero Waste to other communities, help them implement specific Zero Waste rules, build Zero Waste infrastructure, and create local Zero Waste economies. Through the Eco-I program, Eco-Cycle staff members were featured speakers at the International Solid Waste Association Organics meeting in Italy, the Missouri state recycling conference, the Colorado state recycling conference, the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE) forum and a webinar hosted by the Product Stewardship Institute. Eco-Cycle staff also consulted for the Big Island and Kauai, Hawaii and the island of Key West, Florida, which led the island to issue a contract for a Zero Waste plan.

Eco-Cycle is also providing model programs for others to emulate and is using multimedia materials to showcase these programs. The Eco-Cycle International website was officially launched at [www.ecocycleinternational.com](http://www.ecocycleinternational.com) and will be further developed in 2011. Also in 2010, Eco-Cycle hosted a groundbreaking "Getting to Zero Waste Summit" in Boulder with nine experts from around the U.S. and Canada. Two important products came out of the summit and will be published in 2011: A template to help "Any Town, USA" chart their way to a 70% recycling rate and a road map for a community to reach a 90% recovery rate through waste reduction, reuse, recycling and composting.



## 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 54,000 students and staff in 82 Boulder Valley and St. Vrain Valley public schools. Annually, Eco-Cycle educators give more than 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 12<sup>th</sup> grade students in Boulder and Broomfield County classrooms.



Eco-Cycle is pushing the boundaries of environmental education and training our future citizens with its Green Star Schools program. Through this comprehensive, first-in-the-nation Zero Waste program, Eco-Cycle works with schools to address every aspect of their waste stream, making Zero Waste principles like composting, recycling and waste reduction an integral part of their daily routine. In 2010, the program expanded beyond elementary schools to include mainstream middle schools and impacted 9,000 students, ages 3-14, in 24 Boulder County public schools. Last year, Green Star Schools reduced their trash by one-third by composting non-recyclable paper and food scraps from their kitchens, cafeterias and classrooms. These schools diverted another one-third of their waste from the

landfill through recycling and other waste reduction practices, such as learning to pack waste-free lunches and Zero Waste school events.

## 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 2010, Eco-Cycle worked with Boulder County staff members to write a Zero Waste plan that includes recommendations for Boulder County government and its various municipalities to create new rules, ordinances, and infrastructure to meet the County's Zero Waste goals.

## 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 2010, Eco-Cycle answered an average of 900 phone questions each month and gave 45 presentations and recycling facility tours to community groups. Eco-Cycle also published several print pieces on a variety of topics including 71,000 copies of the *Eco-Cycle Times* newsletter, 80,000 single-stream recycling guidelines, including the “Dirty Dozen” worst contaminants, which were inserted in the Longmont *Times Call*. Near the end of 2010, Eco-Cycle updated and published 54,850 copies of the annual *Holiday Guide*, which was inserted in the Boulder *Camera* and Longmont *Times-Call* and distributed at events, drop-off centers, businesses and schools throughout Boulder County.



In addition, the organization's website provided useful information and tools to 843,565 visitors. As many as 15% of website visitors were from outside the U.S. and Canada. In 2010, Eco-Cycle sent 15 email newsletters or alerts to 26,102 supporters and customers about recycling events, educational workshops and volunteer opportunities. In May 2010, Eco-Cycle also launched the *Eco-Buzz Network*, an ongoing series of email and social media messages around monthly campaigns on Zero

Waste living, reducing our climate impact and waste reduction. Eco-Cycle's network of “Eco-Buzzers” now includes more than 400 people. On Facebook and Twitter, 1,370 fans and followers receive weekly *Eco-Buzz* tips and info.

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, Eco-Cycle staffers work with vendors to ensure that all discards produced are either compostable or recyclable, eliminating (or substantially reducing) the need for trash bins. In 2010, Eco-Cycle educated 138,900 people at 26 large Zero Waste events throughout the community, such as festivals and triathlons, keeping an average of 87% of event discards and more than 200,000 pounds of resources out of the landfill through composting and recycling. These efforts conserved 12,000 gallons of gasoline, avoided more than 2,000 pounds of air and water pollution, and saved the greenhouse gas equivalent of taking 34 cars off the road for a year. Eco-Cycle also trained and consulted for more than 39 mid-sized events, which 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 (the first ongoing Zero Waste events in the nation). 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 2010, the kit was purchased for use at 173 small to medium-sized events such as corporate meetings, weddings and backyard barbecues.

## COMMUNITY OUTREACH (CONTINUED):



In 2010, Eco-Cycle developed and branded an entirely new *Recycle it Right!* Campaign for public education and outreach in Longmont, which included eight original *Recycle it Right!* print pieces such as pledge cards, guideline door-hangers, as well as educational handouts specific for multi-family dwellings. Eco-Cycle also printed 32 weekly columns about waste reduction and recycling that ran in the Longmont *Times-Call*. In addition, Eco-Cycle attended 24 public events educating event-goers about “Recycle it Right” and waste reduction opportunities.

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. To reach this community, all *Recycle it Right!* materials were translated to Spanish, and Spanish-speaking canvassers went to Latino neighborhoods to explain guidelines and answer questions. As a result of Eco-Cycle’s Latino Outreach program, more than 13,000 people were educated about the importance of recycling and how to *Recycle it Right!*

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 3,000 hours of their time in 2010 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.



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