

# Annual Report | 2011



**eco-cycle®**  
Working to Build Zero Waste Communities

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## 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 2011, Eco-Cycle received the Boulder County Gold People's Choice Award for Best Non-Profit Organization. The Green Star Schools program was recognized by the Colorado Association for Recycling (the state recycling association) with its Recycling Industry Award for Outstanding Outreach - Educational Institution. The program also received the Red Empress Foundation Collaborative Challenge Award.

## ORGANIZATIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

Eco-Cycle® employed 65 full-time and 4 part-time employees in 2011. Many staff members have been with the company for more than a decade and some more than 20 years.

## 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. Using a state-of-the-art single-stream sorting system, which allows recyclers to mix their paper and containers together in one bin, Eco-Cycle processed and marketed 52,422 tons of traditional recyclable materials in 2011, 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 127,663 metric tons of carbon dioxide (MTCO<sub>2</sub>e) and saved the greenhouse gas equivalent of taking nearly 23,300 cars off the road for a year. By recycling instead of landfilling these materials, Eco-Cycle created 69 local jobs and helped our community avoid 523 tons of air pollution, 2.1 tons of water pollution, 138 tons of toxic herbicides, and 64,100 tons of toxic substances that threaten human health such as carcinogens, particulate matter and volatile organic compounds.\*

*\*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 (a.k.a. Styrofoam®), durable #2 plastics, used cooking oil, porcelain sinks and toilets, fire extinguishers, plastic bags and plastic bubble wrap, and yoga mats. Each year, Eco-Cycle adds at least one new material to this list. The CHaRM recently added the Boulder County scrap metal collection program, which brings in an average of 700 new visitors per month. 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 2011, 23,169 recyclers visited the CHaRM, and the facility processed 900,000 pounds of electronics, 42 trailers full of block foam, 6.35 million plastic bags, 81,800 pounds of porcelain, 8,800 bike tires and 205,000 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 3,449 metric tons of carbon dioxide (MTCO<sub>2</sub>e), the equivalent of conserving 386,659 gallons of gasoline.\*

*\*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's Executive Director was a featured speaker at several international and national conferences: the Solid Waste Association of America's first conference on Zero Waste, the International



Biopolymers Conference about the problems and opportunities of “bioplastics,” and the American Public Works Association Conference on the “10-Year Plan for Building a Zero Waste City.”

Eco-Cycle was selected by the U.S. State Department to participate in the first Community Solutions program, a professional development program that matches emerging community leaders from developing countries with pioneering U.S. organizations. For four months in 2011, Eco-Cycle hosted and trained a resident of Trinidad and Tobago, Essie Parks (pictured), on how to implement Zero Waste and become a model for the Caribbean. Eco-Cycle's Executive Director also served as a Mentor to four Zero Waste entrepreneurs from Mexico, China, Guatemala and India through the Unreasonable Institute and as a Special Advisor on Zero Waste to SUEZ Environmental (Paris), the largest waste/water utility company in the world. Eco-Cycle's Executive Director was asked to write a section for a book to be published in Italy in 2013 on “Social Enterprise and Zero Waste.” In 2011, Eco-Cycle published a groundbreaking paper on “microplastics in compost” that became a topic of national discussion among compost collection program coordinators, processors and haulers, and that was featured in several national composting conferences, where Eco-Cycle staff urged composting programs throughout the U.S. to keep plastic-coated paper products out of compost.



## 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. The relocation of the Boulder County scrap metal program to the CHaRM allowed us to create new reuse opportunities for anyone in the community, such as providing scrap metal for area industrial design students to practice welding and metal construction and offering up

microwaves to be fixed and donated to low income families. Newer computer equipment is repurposed through Boulder Community Computers, an organization that installs new hard drives and then refurbishes the machines for students and others who might not be able to afford a new computer. Through this new program, 12,121 pounds of electronics were saved for reuse in 2011. Programs are also in place to glean reusable bikes and bike parts, books, cell phones, printer cartridges and yoga mats 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 2011, Eco-Cycle sorted and distributed approximately 17,000 used children’s books to at-risk, low income and underserved children through 11 preschools and 17 nonprofit 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, such as used building materials, appliances, electronics, moving supplies, sports equipment, furniture, office supplies and plants. More than 900 members have helped keep 13,000 lbs. of materials out of landfills and in valuable use in our community.



## Businesses: Making ZERO WASTE the New Business model



For the past six years, Eco-Cycle® has offered a unique Zero Waste Services package to businesses. This program is helping businesses keep up to 90% of the discards they produce out of landfills and offers a new approach to resource management and environmental sustainability. More than 70 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 2011, eight new businesses signed up for the comprehensive, groundbreaking Zero Waste Services program.

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. Diversion reports, including resources saved, have given many of Eco-Cycle customers an added dimension to support their business both

internally and externally. In 2011, Eco-Cycle simplified its business recycling and composting guidelines posters and also added “landfill” guidelines for trash items. The clean and modern look with enlarged images and fewer words has helped employees working in fast-paced businesses easily follow the guidelines.

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 2011, Eco-Cycle’s Zero Waste Services Program recovered 20,259,297 pounds of single-stream recyclables and 6,985,170 pounds of compostables, a total of over 27.2 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 2011, five additional area businesses signed up for this service.

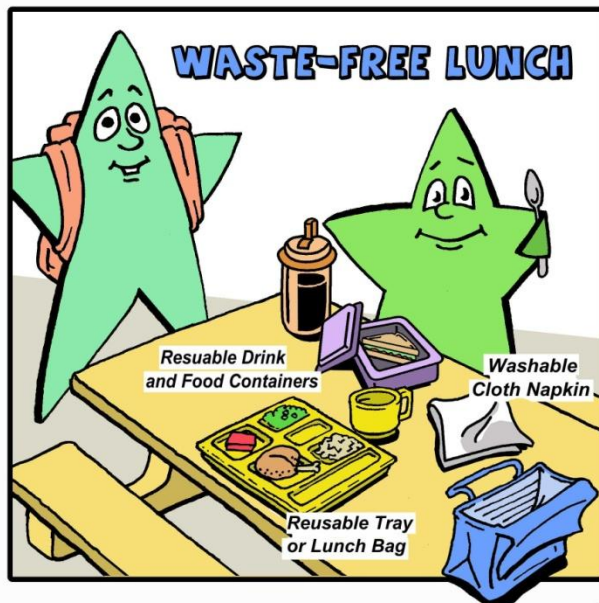


## Schools: Teaching the Next Generation

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 1,500 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 47,000 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 2011, the program



expanded to include five additional schools and impacted more than 11,000 students, ages 3-14, and more than 1,600 school staff in 29 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 projects, such as Composting with Worms workshops, a *Holiday Recycling Guide*, Zero Waste school events and a reusable water bottle project.



## 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 reuse, recycling and composting, and advance our community's—and the nation's—progress toward Zero Waste.



In 2011, Eco-Cycle launched its redesigned website [www.ecocycle.org](http://www.ecocycle.org), with a fresh new look, easier navigation, and new ways to take action for a healthier planet. The website received over 30 million hits in 2011. Each month, the site provided useful information and tools to more than 60,000 visitors. More than 15% of website visitors were from outside the U.S. and Canada. Eco-Cycle used social media as a way to stay connected with fans, to provide insight and education on issues related to Zero Waste in our community and abroad, and to join conversations on environmental issues that affect our nation and others around the

world. The organization upped its presence on both Facebook and Twitter: On Facebook, Eco-Cycle had a steady flow of nearly 1,000 monthly active users, and on Twitter Eco-Cycle had 927 followers. Eco-Cycle also maintained a YouTube channel and posted videos about recycling guidelines and contaminants, local events, how to throw a do-it-yourself Zero Waste Event and more. In addition, Eco-Cycle sent 20 email newsletters or alerts to nearly 29,000 supporters and customers about recycling events, educational workshops and volunteer opportunities.

Eco-Cycle continues to maintain a steady presence in the local newspapers: the *Camera* (Boulder) and *Times-Call* (Longmont). In 2011, 70 news articles were generated about Eco-Cycle programs. Additionally, 45 “Tee-Cee’s Tip-of-the-Week” columns on recycling and Zero Waste tips were written by Eco-Cycle staff and printed in the *Times-Call*. Eleven ads on proper single-stream recycling were created and placed by Eco-Cycle on behalf of the Boulder County Resource Conservation Division. Sixteen ads on recycling opportunities were created and placed on behalf of the City of Longmont. And, 15 additional ads promoting Eco-Cycle events and the new website were placed in local papers and other publications.

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 2011, Eco-Cycle educated 133,500 people at 24 large Zero Waste events throughout the community, such as festivals and triathlons, keeping an average of 88% of event discards and more than 30,000 pounds of resources out of the landfill through composting and recycling, saving the energy equivalent of 1,100 gallons of gasoline. Eco-Cycle also trained and consulted for more than 32 do-it-





yourself mid-sized events, which used our expertise and materials to run their own Zero Waste events. Eco-Cycle also continued its Zero Waste efforts at the Boulder Farmers' Market (the first ongoing Zero Waste event in the nation) and Longmont Farmers' Market. Over the course of the market season, nearly 500,000 farmers' 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 2011, the kit was purchased for use at 147 small to medium-sized events such as corporate meetings, weddings and backyard barbecues.

In addition to making events waste-free, Eco-Cycle provided community members the resources and tools to live more sustainably. In 2011, Eco-Cycle launched a "Stop Junk Mail for GOOD" campaign and engaged more than 1,000 Boulder County residents and business in reducing unwanted mail and phone books. Subscribers opted out of 10,110 unwanted mailings, preventing 52,250 pounds of solid waste and saving 365 trees and 354,913 gallons of water. Eco-Cycle also re-launched its online Eco-Store, a green purchasing website to provide our community and beyond with more than 600 recycled and environmentally-sound products, such as non-toxic cleaners, compostable products, reusable lunch supplies and much more.



Eco-Cycle updated and printed our annual *Holiday Recycling Guide*. The printed guide, now bilingual, includes a long list of holiday-related items and how to recycle them in Boulder County. Nearly 4,000 guides were distributed through recycling centers and businesses throughout Boulder County, as well as to students in Eco-Cycle's Green Star Schools program, and it was distributed digitally as an e-newsletter to more than 7,000 people. The holiday recycling information was also printed as full-page ads with guidelines tailored specifically to each community in five local newspapers and print publications. Eco-Cycle's online *Holiday Recycling Guide* included tips for reducing waste at the holidays and a sustainable gift-giving guide. Eco-Cycle also answered an average of 794 phone questions each month from its recycling hotline and gave 30 presentations and recycling facility tours to community groups.

Eco-Cycle continued the *Recycle it Right!* campaign for public education and outreach in Longmont. A team of six Eco-Cycle paid canvassers fully trained in recycling guidelines for the curb and the drop-off center visited Longmont neighborhoods to spread the word and answer questions about recycling in person. Canvassers also distributed printed *Recycle it Right!* (or ¡Recíclalo bien!) Longmont-specific, bilingual recycling guidelines, door hangers and refrigerator magnets with the website and recycling information hotline to more than 10,000 Longmont homes. In addition, the team hung signs around target neighborhoods that said “Eco-Cycle is in your neighborhood,” to give additional visibility for the canvassers’ presence in the community and on Sundays set up a tent with displays, information, and refreshments in city parks near the canvassing effort and at the Longmont Waste Diversion Center. Eco-Cycle also wrote 44 weekly columns about waste reduction and recycling that ran in the Longmont *Times-Call*. In addition, Eco-Cycle organized or attended 58 public events educating event-goers about how to “Recycle it Right/¡Recíclalo bien!” and other 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, Eco-Cycle materials such as recycling guidelines, brochures, the *Holiday Recycling Guide* and magnets were all printed in Spanish. Eco-Cycle also provides a Spanish recycling hotline, resources in Spanish on its website, and Spanish language videos on its YouTube channel. In 2011, Eco-Cycle distributed 12,700 pieces of bilingual recycling information.

Eco-Cycle’s Eco-Leader Network of volunteers plays a significant role in our outreach and education efforts. This group of 783 dedicated recyclers donated close to 1,000 hours of their time in 2011 to 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. The value of this volunteer support is more than \$20,000 annually.

## STAFF & BOARD

### Chief Administrative Staff

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Cyndra Dietz, Schools Manager

Dale Ekart, Business Recycling Manager

Dan Matsch, CHaRM Manager

Lou Perez, Operations Manager

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