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Ten Years of Progress: annual Colorado recycling report shows gains on local, state level over last decade

Programs and policies to reduce waste, boost recycling and composting, are moving the state toward a more sustainable, resilient, circular economy

DENVER - To mark the start of Colorado Recycles Week, Eco-Cycle and CoPIRG Foundation released their 10th annual State of Recycling and Composting report. The report lifts up the progress made at the state and local levels in Colorado over the last decade to pass key nation-leading policies that will result in significant waste reduction and diversion of materials from landfills in 2027 and beyond.

The report highlighted that, as a state, Colorado diverted 29% more food scraps and yard trimmings from landfills in 2025 compared to 2023—avoiding significant landfill emissions of methane and creating compost and mulch that can make healthier soils that are more resilient to drought and flooding and could reduce the need for almost three million gallons of irrigation water. In addition, the report pointed to significant local increases in composting and recycling in Aspen, Denver, and Longmont. The City of Boulder and Eco-Cycle launched an interactive *Reuse Hub for Boulder & Beyond* illustrating the growing number of reuse and repair opportunities in Colorado, including through businesses such as Colorado-based Retrocycle's reusable cup program launching in seven municipalities.

"Ten years ago, we launched our annual State of Recycling and Composting Report to underscore how far behind Colorado was in terms of recycling and composting, while shining a light on leading local communities and businesses that were demonstrating what was possible to achieve," **said Suzanne Jones, Eco-Cycle executive director.** "In this tenth edition, we are thrilled to celebrate how far we've come toward building a Zero Waste Colorado, including passing nation-leading Producer Responsibility policies, a statewide single-use plastic bag ban, and many local community initiatives. We look forward to continuing this important work with Governor-Elect Weiser, the new General Assembly, and local governments across the state to realize Colorado's sustainability ambitions."

"We call it waste but so much of the trash we produce is either unnecessary and can be eliminated with better designed products, or is valuable and can be repaired, reused, recycled or composted into something useful again," **said Danny Katz, CoPIRG Foundation executive director.** "10 years of our reports shows that, when Colorado communities prioritize diverting valuable materials away from landfills, it works. And Colorado's nation-leading policies like

cutting plastic bag waste and ensuring people have the Right to Repair will help Coloradans reduce our impact on our communities and planet even further."

The report tracks Zero Waste programs, policies, and progress toward achieving a circular economy that will reduce the materials we need to begin with, keep resources in use for longer, and design waste out of the whole system. The benefits are significant: less pollution, less reliance on extractive industries, less energy and water use, more green jobs, more resilient local supply chains, and a healthier food and agricultural system.

The report highlighted waste reduction progress over the last decade including:

- The number of Colorado communities that provide or require single-family residential curbside organics collection jumped from 5 in 2017 to at least 13 in 2026.
- The number of Colorado communities that guarantee recycling for single-family residents jumped from 12 in 2017 to at least 23 in 2026. By 2030, all Coloradans will have access to recycling thanks to the adoption of Colorado's Producer Responsibility for Packaging and Paper program.
- Colorado's PaintCare program has collected 8.3 million gallons of leftover paint since its launch in 2015.
- The City of Boulder's construction and deconstruction (C&D) recycling and reuse ordinance has diverted 114,132 tons of C&D materials from landfills since its adoption in 2020.
- Denver has expanded residential compost collection to approximately 50,000 more households (80,400 total households) resulting in 67,656 tons of organic materials (food scraps and yard trimmings) being diverted from the landfill since 2023.
- Aspen businesses diverted 2,303 tons of organic discards from landfills in 2025, up from 804 tons in 2023, after adoption of the City's Organic Waste Ordinance.
- Longmont's commercial waste diversion rate leaped from 35% in 2023 to 62% in 2026 after implementing its Universal Recycling Ordinance.
- Colorado has eliminated an estimated 4.1 to 5.8 billion single-use checkout bags since the Plastic Pollution Reduction Act went into effect in 2023.
- Coloradans now have the broadest repair rights of any state in the country thanks to a combination of three Right to Repair policies adopted into law in the past decade.

Despite these significant wins and successes over the last decade, Colorado still has more work to do to ensure we reduce unnecessary waste, reuse more items to avoid producing so much stuff in the first place, and recycle or compost everything else.

Eco-Cycle and CoPIRG Foundation highlighted key next steps in 2027 and beyond for cities and the state, including:

- **Ensure Colorado's Producer Responsibility for Packaging and Paper program achieves its goals** of delivering free access to recycling for all Coloradans, incentivizing waste reduction, and ensuring that materials collected for recycling are verifiably made into new products.

- **Grow our circular organics economy** by adopting a state-level policy requiring large generators to divert nonedible food scraps and yard trimmings from landfills into beneficial uses such as compost.
- **Reduce unnecessary plastic waste** by adopting policies such as “Skip the Stuff” that requires restaurants to get confirmation from customers first before needlessly providing unwanted single-use items such as utensils, straws, and condiment packets.

The report can be found at www.ecocycle.org/SORC.

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Eco-Cycle is a Zero Waste pioneer and one of the nation’s oldest and largest nonprofit recyclers. Eco-Cycle innovates, implements, and advocates for local and global Zero Waste solutions to foster a more regenerative, equitable, and climate-resilient future. For more information: www.ecocycle.org

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