2026

THE STATE OF

RECYCLING & COMPOSTING

IN COLORADO

10th EDITION



eco-cycle

CoPIRG Foundation

THE STATE OF

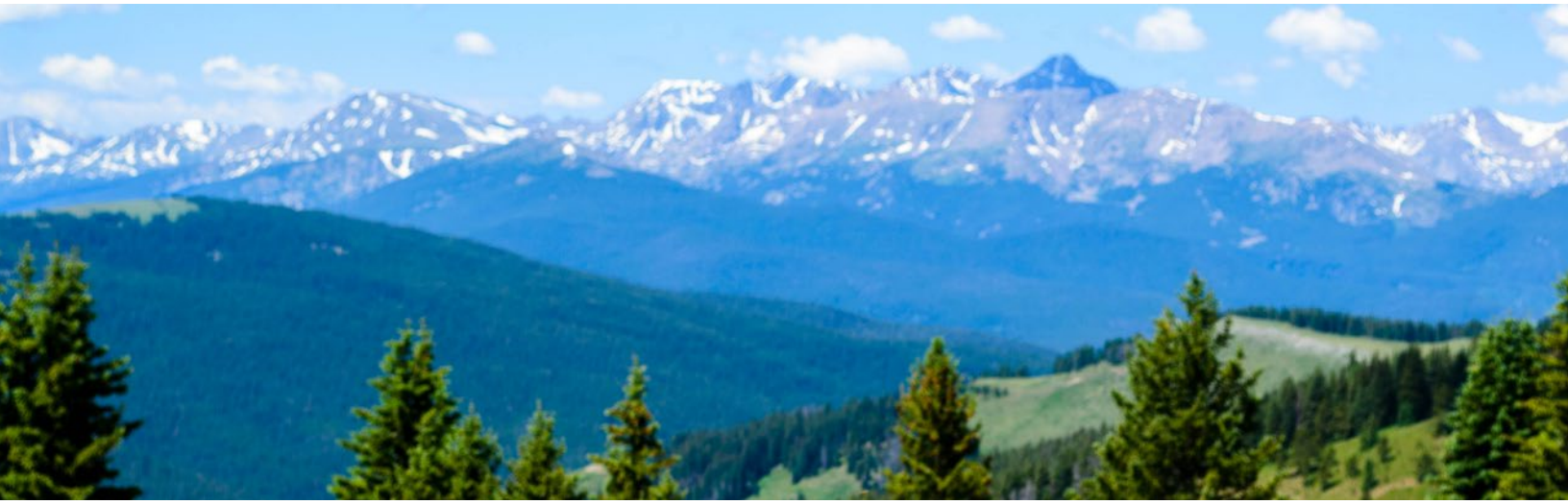
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Eco-Cycle and CoPIRG



About Us

Established in 1976, 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, visit ecocycle.org.

CoPIRG Foundation is a nonprofit, nonpartisan group. Through research, public education, and outreach, we serve as counterweights to the influence of powerful special interests that threaten our health, safety, or well-being. For more information, visit copirgfoundation.org.

Table of Contents

About the Report i

Executive Summary ii

Section 1: Progress in the Past Decade 1
- Ten Years of Reporting and the Changes We've Made, Together 2
- What We've Accomplished in the Last 10 Years 3
- By the Numbers: Policy Impacts 6
- Together, We Are Changing the System 7

Section 2: Progress in the Past Year and the Priorities Ahead 8

Composting and Food Donation 9
- Recent Organics Diversion and Data Reporting in Colorado 12
- Local Organics Progress in the Past Year 14
- Colorado Compost Champions 16
- What's Next for Organics Diversion 16

Recycling 18
- Statewide Progress: Colorado's Producer Responsibility for Packaging and Paper Program Begins to Deliver 18
- Local Recycling Progress in the Past Year 19
- Colorado Recycling Champion 21
- What's Next in Packaging Recycling 21

Recycling: Hard-to-Recycle Materials 22
- Statewide Progress: Steady Expansion of Producer Responsibility Programs for Hard-to-Recycle Materials 22
- Local Hard-to-Recycle Progress in the Past Year 23
- Colorado Hard-to-Recycle Champion 24
- What's Next for Hard-to-Recycle Materials 24

Reuse 25
- Local Reuse Progress in the Past Year 25
- Colorado Reuse Champions 27
- What's Next for Reuse in Colorado 27

Reducing Waste and Consumption 28
- Statewide Progress: Legislative Efforts to Reduce Waste 28
- Local Progress in Reducing Waste in the Past Year 29
- Colorado Reuse Champions 29
- What's Next for Waste Reduction in Colorado 30

Section 3: Priorities for the Future 31

What's Next: A Call to Action for Governor-Elect Weiser and the 76th General Assembly 32

Appendices 36
- Appendix A: A Note About Diversion Numbers 37
- Appendix B: Colorado's Progress in the Last Decade: Local Government Policy Scorecard 38

References 41

About the report

Over the past decade, Colorado has built real momentum toward a circular economy. This 10th edition of the State of Recycling and Composting in Colorado Report is divided into three sections:

1

Progress in the Past Decade

The accomplishments we've made together over ten years to advance recycling, composting, reuse, and waste reduction in Colorado.

2

Progress in the Past Year

The advances made across the state and at local levels, and the priorities ahead.

3

Priorities for the Future

A call to action for Governor-Elect Weiser and members of the 76th Colorado General Assembly to build on this momentum.

Executive Summary

2026 State of Recycling and Composting in Colorado
10th Edition

This is the 10th edition of a report originally known as The State of Recycling in Colorado that was launched in 2017 to call attention to a critical gap: at that time, despite Colorado's green reputation, only a scattering of communities had effective recycling programs. In that first report, Eco-Cycle and CoPIRG made the case that local governments and the State needed to take dramatic action by passing policies and funding infrastructure and programming to create truly circular economies. In a circular economy, we reduce the extraction of natural resources, keep resources in use for as long as possible, and design waste out of the whole system. The benefits are significant: less pollution, less reliance on extractive industries, lower costs, less energy and water use, more green jobs, resilient local supply chains, and a healthier food and agricultural system.

This year's report documents that, over the past decade, Colorado has made important progress toward building a true circular economy that supports reducing, reusing, recycling, and composting. We look back at what has been accomplished, highlighting the progress of the past year, and we call on Governor-Elect Weiser and members of the 76th Colorado General Assembly to build on the momentum we've created together as a state.

Progress in the Past Decade

When we released the inaugural report in 2017, Colorado was far behind the rest of the country in terms of reducing, reusing, recycling, and composting. Today, the state is moving from Zero Waste laggard to emerging leader across all four areas. We were the first non-coastal state to ban plastic checkout bags and expanded polystyrene takeout containers, the third state to adopt Producer Responsibility for packaging and paper, and one of the first to adopt Producer Responsibility for loose batteries and EV batteries. We are also leading the nation when it comes to protecting Coloradans' ability to fix their things—three Right-to-Repair laws mean Coloradans have the broadest repair rights of any state in the country. Local governments have also made tremendous progress in the past decade by adopting meaningful policies to expand access to recycling and composting and to reduce waste. For example, of the 37 communities that responded to our survey this year, 23 guarantee recycling access to all single-family residents through ordinances, municipal hauling programs, or municipal contracts. That is up from 15 communities that guaranteed recycling access to all single-family residents in 2017.[1] By 2030, thanks to Producer Responsibility, ALL Colorado residents living in both single-family homes and multifamily homes will have access to recycling in all 272 municipalities and unincorporated areas of the state.[2]

Colorado's Recycling Revolution:
From Limited Access to Access for All



** Based on the 37 municipalities that responded to our survey*

Progress in the Past Year

Colorado continued to make progress in 2025 and 2026. In addition to celebrating some of the many champions working to build true circularity in Colorado, this year's report details specific actions taken and successes achieved by Colorado businesses, communities, and the State in the past year. Some progress achieved since our last report includes:

- **Composting:** For the second year in a row, Colorado increased the total amount of organic material diverted from landfills. Food scraps composted rose from 110,000 tons in 2024 to 235,000 tons in 2025. Still, we landfill nearly four times more organic material than we divert through composting and mulching combined.[4]
- **Recycling:** After four years of planning, Producer Responsibility for packaging and paper started implementing free access to recycling in 2026. By 2030, the rollout will expand recycling to 700,000 additional households, ensuring all Coloradans have free recycling access.[5]
- **Hard-to-recycle materials:** In 2026, Colorado added an electric-vehicle battery law and started rulemaking for its small- and medium-format battery law. The collection of automotive containers began under the Producer Responsibility for Packaging law and PaintCare continues to be a successful model for Producer Responsibility.
- **Reuse:** Colorado made important strides in reuse as a number of communities partnered with Retrocycle to start reusable cup programs, and the City of Boulder and Eco-Cycle launched the Reuse Hub online map and platform showcasing reuse and repair businesses in the Front Range. Significant policy wins included the beginning of implementation for Right to Repair for consumer electronics in January 2026, and the successful lobbying of the Recycle Colorado Construction & Deconstruction Council to get the International Code Council to adopt allowances for salvaged lumber in its 2027 building code update.[6]
- **Waste reduction:** Of the 37 communities responding to our survey, 28 responded that they now are implementing single-use plastic reduction laws, up from only three in 2017.[7] We estimate that between 4.1 billion and 5.8 billion single-use checkout bags have not been put on Colorado markets thanks to the Plastic Pollution Reduction Act's implementation, which started in 2023.[8] We continue to see waste reduction benefits from single-use checkout bag bans, including in Denver, which reported a 99% reduction in single-use plastic checkout bags since their ban went into effect.[9]



Priorities for the Future

While Colorado has made significant policy progress, and we're beginning to see forward momentum to reduce, reuse, recycle, and compost, the State and local communities have more work to do. To make the next decade the one where Colorado truly becomes a national leader in Zero Waste and the circular economy, we call on Governor-Elect Weiser and the legislature to:

- Incorporate Zero Waste strategies and consumption-based emissions into the State's climate plans.
- Lead by example, starting with state agencies and projects in areas such as expanding reuse, recycling, and composting at state agencies; using compost on state infrastructure projects; deconstructing instead of demolishing state buildings; and using reclaimed materials in new construction.
- Ensure Producer Responsibility programs deliver on their goals of providing equitable access to recycling for all Coloradans, incentivizing better designs for products that minimize and eliminate waste and toxics and increase the use of postconsumer recycled content, as well as creating a recycling system Coloradans can trust to verifiably and transparently turn recyclable packaging into new products.
- Adopt Producer Responsibility for other problematic materials such as electronics (including single-use vapes), mattresses, carpets, and pharmaceuticals.
- Grow our circular organics economy with an organics resource recovery requirement for large generators and continued investments for Colorado businesses and communities so that they can grow organics diversion capacity and provide more finished compost to agricultural lands and public infrastructure projects.
- Enact policies that ensure that the extraction, processing, and disposal of materials does not disproportionately impact lower-income communities and communities of color.
- Reduce unnecessary plastic waste by passing Skip the Stuff legislation, where restaurants no longer automatically distribute single-use food ware accessories.
- Protect Coloradans from toxics in packaging and waste-to-fuel facilities.

As we move into 2027 and beyond, Colorado needs to build off the work we have done and ensure we have a future of less waste and pollution, an economy based on circular systems with less natural resource extraction, and more resilient communities. We stand ready to work with the new governor, legislature, and community leaders around the state to make it happen. With strong leadership, the economic, social, and environmental benefits of recycling, composting, reuse, and waste reduction can be fully realized.

SECTION 1

Progress in the Past Decade



In this section

2 Ten Years of Reporting

3 What We've Accomplished in the Last 10 Years

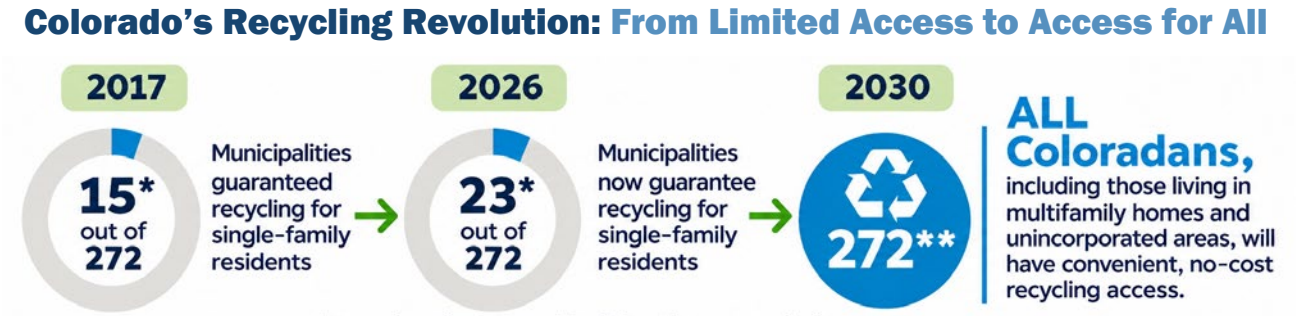
6 By the Numbers: Policy Impacts

7 Together, We Are Changing the System

Ten Years of Reporting and the Changes We've Made, Together

Over the past 10 years, earlier editions of this report have helped propel Colorado forward by highlighting state and local policies and the expansion of municipal programs and business services focused on improving recycling, composting, and waste reduction.

In 2017, we released the inaugural State of Recycling in Colorado report to shine a light on how far behind the rest of the country Colorado was in terms of recycling. In that report, we celebrated that the state had just adopted recycling goals for the first time, and we made recommendations for how we could meet those goals. The state, local governments, businesses, and recycling organizations have made tremendous progress in laying the groundwork toward the recommendations we called for 10 years ago. Today, our state and many communities are collecting better data, expanding curbside recycling, creating financial incentives to support Zero Waste, and expanding composting infrastructure. For example, of the 37 Colorado communities that responded to our survey, only 15 guaranteed recycling for all single-family residents in 2017, whether through ordinances, hauling contracts, or municipal hauling programs. However, of those same 37 municipalities, 23 guaranteed recycling today. By 2030, thanks to HB22-1355, Colorado's Producer Responsibility for Recycling Packaging and Paper will provide convenient, no-cost recycling access to ALL Coloradans, in single-family and multifamily housing, across all 272 municipalities *and* unincorporated areas.[10] Even with this progress, we still have a ways to go to meet Colorado's recycling goals, and to create truly circular economies where we reduce the extraction of natural resources, keep resources in use for as long as possible, and design waste out of the whole system. As we have made progress over the past decade, we have been able to broaden our reporting from a focus on recycling to an approach that includes more of the pieces of the Zero Waste puzzle: composting, reuse, waste reduction, and more. Through sharing stories of local communities making progress, elevating leaders across the state who are taking action, and providing recommendations for next steps, we are proud to have been a part of the dramatic shift in Colorado.



** Based on the 37 municipalities that responded to our survey*
*** Per municipal responses on page 41, and CDPHE. "Producer Responsibility Program."* cdphe.colorado.gov/hm/epr-program.

It is an honor to report on and work alongside the elected leaders, local government staff, entrepreneurs, community members, and other Zero Waste champions who are helping create the Colorado we envision with less waste, more green jobs, and local circular economies. This year's report highlights the state's and local communities' accomplishments in the last year and over the past 10. The report also calls us to take action to build off of the work we have done and ensure we have a future of less waste and pollution, an economy based on circular systems with less natural resource extraction, and more resilient communities. We have a great opportunity to work with the new governor, legislature, and community leaders around the state to make it happen.

What We've Accomplished in the Last 10 Years

Colorado has made enormous progress over the last decade. We have adopted policies and implemented programs to create the systems and behavior changes that will increase diversion of materials from the landfill and reduce waste.

Colorado has adopted game-changing state policies that are moving the state from Zero Waste laggard to leader. We are the first non-coastal state to ban plastic checkout bags and expanded polystyrene takeout containers. We are the third state in the nation to adopt Producer Responsibility for recycling packaging and paper (and the second to start implementing it). We are one of the first to adopt Producer Responsibility laws for small- and medium-format batteries as well as EV batteries, and we are leading the nation with three Right-to-Repair laws.

Each step we take toward Zero Waste builds off of previous policies and actions. A state law like the Plastic Pollution Reduction Act allows local governments to adopt plastic reduction policies. One city's universal recycling law provides a model others can follow. Many local governments are making advances by focusing on one stream (like recycling) at a time and then, after having success, adding policies and programs that include additional streams (such as composting as well as construction and deconstruction) and waste reduction practices (such as reuse and repair).

Colorado has adopted game-changing state policies that are moving the state from Zero Waste laggard to leader.



Zero Waste is also an environmental justice issue. The burdens of our "take, make, waste" system fall unevenly. Fracking and drilling for oil and gas, used to create energy and plastics, are twice as likely to happen near Hispanic communities than white communities in the US.[11] Bauxite ore, a key ingredient for making aluminum, is often mined on or near Indigenous lands at strip mines, destroying ecosystems and polluting water sources.[12] Much of our paper comes from logging in Canadian boreal forests, harming ecosystems that are the home to many Indigenous and First Nations peoples.[13] Disposal sites, like incinerators and landfills, are far more likely to be located in low-income and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities, affecting residents' health within these communities.[14] At the same time, there is often less access to recycling services for less affluent communities.[15]

Using fewer resources and keeping them in circulation longer eases these burdens, which is why we center environmental justice in our Zero Waste policy work, striving to avoid these disproportionate impacts and elevating voices from diverse communities. For example, the advisory board created by the Producer Responsibility for packaging and paper law has a designated seat for a person "with experience in environmental justice and representing underserved communities," and the Producer Responsibility laws for paper and packaging, paint, and batteries all have requirements for targeted education and convenient access for all communities.

Table 1 gives an overview of the state laws adopted in the past decade. Some are already delivering significant progress, while others will take years to realize their full potential. These laws are important first steps, but implementing each will take time, careful work, and strong community engagement.

Table 1

Forward-Thinking Actions Colorado Has Taken in the Last Decade to Advance Zero Waste and the Circular Economy

Zero Waste Topic	What we've accomplished in the past 10 years	What's next
Organics system build-out	• Updated CDPHE permitting regulations (2023), making it easier to permit new compost facilities • Compostable packaging labeling law requiring clear marking on packaging as certified compostable and prohibiting misleading labeling (2023) • CDPHE Organics Diversion Study (2024) reporting on organics diversion needs and the Colorado Organics Infrastructure toolkit to help communities increase diversion • Air Quality Control Commission landfill methane regulations (2025) requiring better monitoring and mitigation of emissions	State-level **organics resource recovery law** requiring large generators of food scraps, yard trimmings, and cardboard to divert them from landfills State- and local-level policies closing the organics loop by requiring **application of finished compost and mulch to rebuild soil health**
Recycling system improvement	• Producer Responsibility for Packaging and Paper law (2022) requiring producers to fund a system that provides all residents with no-cost recycling collection, and encouraging producers to design packaging that uses less material, more recycled content, and less harmful additives • Colorado Circular Communities Enterprise (C3) (2024) funded by small landfill tip fees, and provides millions of dollars in technical assistance to local governments and grants to advance circular economy solutions • Waste Tire Management Enterprise (2024) updates a fee-based waste tire management program that provides financial incentives for recycling waste tires • Battery stewardship law (2025) requiring battery producers to fund safe collection and recycling of small- and medium-format batteries • Electric vehicle battery law (2026) prioritizing reuse and requiring car manufacturers to collect and recycle unwanted EV batteries	**Fully implement Producer Responsibility laws to ensure programs fund convenient recycling of materials for all Coloradans, and that Coloradans can rely on their recycling system to turn recyclable packaging into new products** **Producer Responsibility for electronics (including vapes)**, mattresses, carpets, pharmaceuticals, etc.
Reuse systems development	Three Right to Repair laws ensuring residents have access to tools and resources to fix products, including laws for powered wheelchairs (2022), agricultural equipment (2023), and consumer electronics (2024)	Local-level adoption of the 2027 International Code Council update to allow the **usage of reclaimed salvage lumber** Local policies and programs for **reusable serviceware at dine-in establishments**
Waste reduction models	Plastic Pollution Reduction Act (2021) banning single-use plastic checkout bags and expanded polystyrene foodware and establishing a fee on single-use paper checkout bags	State-level **Skip the Stuff** law to reduce waste, environmental harms, and costs to businesses by requiring restaurants to provide single-use items (utensils, condiment packets, etc.) upon customer request only **Prohibit toxic additives in packaging, such as** PFAS, BPA, phthalates, heavy metals, and other toxic chemicals **Push back against planned obsolescence** by requiring companies to publish a repair score on their products, empowering consumers to purchase repairable products, and pushing companies to build devices designed to last

In addition to action at the state level, the past 10 years have shown that towns, cities, and counties throughout Colorado are making significant advances toward Zero Waste at the local level. We surveyed communities and compiled the results to demonstrate the dramatic progress. The responses from the 37 communities that replied to our survey show actions taken to divert valuable materials like cardboard, containers, yard trimmings, and food scraps from landfills, increase access to recycling and composting for residents and businesses, capture and reuse more deconstructed materials from buildings, support reuse infrastructure, and reduce overall waste. The progress made is building momentum and effecting real impacts on Colorado's circular economy that will benefit Coloradans for generations to come. (See Appendix B for a list of communities surveyed, including the local government names and years of implementation when known.)

Table 2

Overview of Local Government Policies Passed in the Last Decade[16]

Local Government Policy or Program*	Communities with policies before 2017	Communities with policies today
Provides or requires single-family** residential curbside organics collection	5	13
Requires multifamily and/or commercial properties to have composting services	1	5
Guarantees recycling for single-family residents**	12	23
Requires volume-based pricing for residential waste collection	7	17
Requires multifamily and/or commercial properties to have recycling services	4	13
Requires or incentivizes public events to have recycling, composting, or other waste diversion	1	17
Requires recycling or reuse of materials at deconstruction and remodel sites	1	6
Implements plastic-reduction policies or programs at the local level (e.g., fee or ban on plastic bags, incentives for reusables, require restaurants to give out single-use basics upon customer request)***	2	22

SOURCE: See municipal responses on page 41.

** Based on responses from the 37 Colorado communities that responded to our survey*

*** Colorado Revised Statute 30-15-401(7) prohibits local governments from compelling residential buildings with eight or more units from participating in any specific waste-hauling contract. For that reason, most local diversion programs center on single-family homes in Colorado. However, local governments may require that properties of any size obtain specific services such as recycling or composting, or volume-based pricing.*

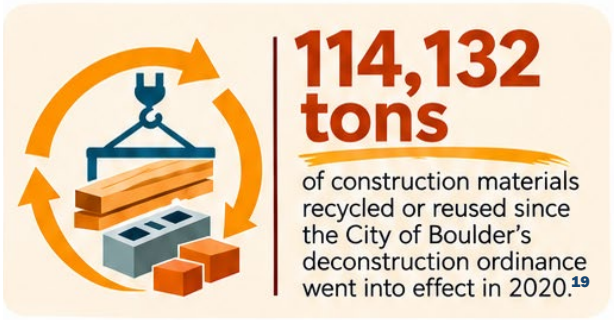
**** While the state Plastic Pollution Reduction Act sets a statewide model for requiring a fee on paper checkout bags and prohibiting plastic checkout bags and expanded polystyrene food serviceware, the law leaves enforcement up to the discretion of local governments. Some local governments are not actively enforcing the law.*

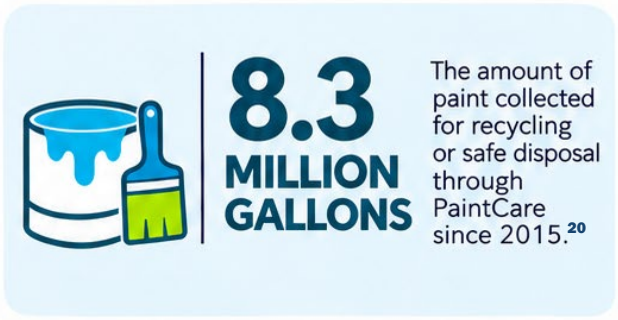
By the Numbers:
Policy Impacts

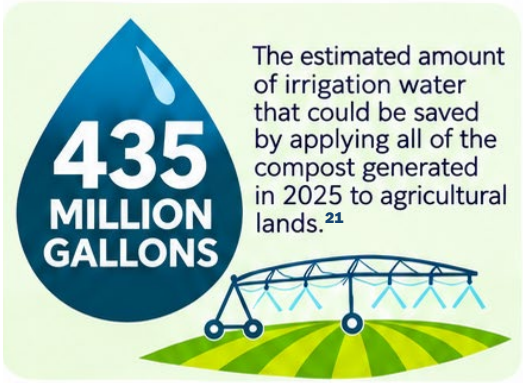
For 10 years, this report has laid out a vision for a circular Colorado. Policy and programmatic actions taken at the state and local levels to achieve that vision are now driving measurable impacts. Each graphic below shows waste diverted from landfills or never created to begin with, and accounts for just some of the examples we're seeing in our state.

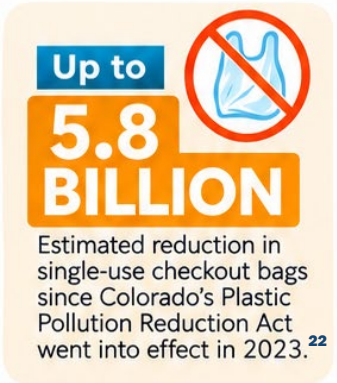














Together, We Are Changing the System

Changing our system from extractive and wasteful to circular and regenerative takes all of us. Whether we are elected officials, local government staff, business owners, employees, or individuals who care, we each have important roles to play. Colorado is already moving forward, and every voice and action adds to that momentum.

This report celebrates local champions and examples of the kind of change we are creating together. Many Coloradans take action every year by signing petitions, emailing elected officials, and speaking up at key decision points. For example, last year, more than 900 Eco-Cycle network members emailed the governor and the director of the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) asking them to approve the Producer Responsibility program plan in a way that ensured authentic recycling.[24] Their voices were heard! In December of 2025, the program plan was approved, kicking off the implementation of Producer Responsibility and requiring that any material counted as recycled in the program is accurately and transparently tracked.[25]

We need everyone to pitch in, from Governor-Elect Weiser and state legislators to municipalities, businesses, residents, and students. That's how we will shift from a linear "take, make, waste" model to a circular economy—one that protects our natural resources and communities by keeping products and materials in use and that prevents pollution by design.

SECTION 2

Progress in the Past Year and the Priorities Ahead



In this section

9 Composting and Food Donation

18 Recycling

22 Recycling: Hard-to-Recycle Materials

25 Reuse

28 Reducing Waste and Consumption

Composting and Food Donation

As we move into the next chapter for Colorado's journey to Zero Waste leader, we will need to address one of the biggest impacts on our climate: methane emissions generated by organic material in the landfill. We have the opportunity to turn that negative into a positive. Making compost out of organic discards and applying it to landscapes reduces landfill methane emissions and helps pull down atmospheric carbon, reducing our climate impact. It's an important part of our Colorado economy, and a critical solution to rebuilding our depleted soils and making them more resilient to flooding and drought.

Instead of Feeding Landfills, We Can Feed More People

About 40% of what Coloradans send to the landfill is organic material like food scraps and yard trimmings.[26] Even as food insecurity is increasing, Colorado landfills almost 600,000 tons of surplus food annually.[27] When organic materials break down in landfills, they generate methane. Methane is a greenhouse gas that is over 80 times as potent as carbon dioxide at trapping heat when measured over a 20-year period.[28] Instead of landfilling these materials, we should be recovering them for their highest use. Edible food should be eaten, and food scraps and yard trimmings should be turned into valuable products like compost, mulch, and biochar.

About 40% of what Coloradans send to the landfill is organic material like food scraps and yard trimmings.



Just as reducing material waste and consumption comes before recycling, reducing food waste prior to composting is immeasurably preferable in terms of social, economic, and environmental benefits. Groups across Colorado are redirecting high-quality surplus food from businesses, events, and individuals to feed people. While the data is limited, **food donations are reported to have fallen in the past 10 years from a high of around 36,000 tons per year in 2019 and 2020 to roughly 31,000 tons in 2023 and 2024.**[29] This decrease is due in part to a reduction in surplus food thanks to intentional efforts to help businesses reduce over-ordering and make better use of food they have purchased.[30] At the same time, cuts to federal funding of food programs, rising food costs, and the increase in people seeking food aid are putting even more pressure on food banks, pantries, and rescue organizations.[31] Nationally and at the state level, there are laws protecting donors and encouraging food donation, including the federal Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Act (1996) and the Food Donation Improvement Act (2021), as well as Colorado's "Efforts to Reduce Food Waste" law (HB25-1166). We should strengthen these efforts through food donation tax incentives and include food donation in any organic landfill diversion requirement law.

Instead of Building Landfills, We Can Build Soil

According to the State's Organics Management Plan, the untapped demand for finished compost in Colorado is potentially five times higher than what is currently generated.[32] Despite this, **we continue to landfill nearly four times more organic material than we divert via composting and mulching combined.**[33] Generations of land development and heavy tilling have disrupted the biodiversity and natural cycles that once kept soil healthy, as animals, plants, and microbes returned organic matter to the ground. The result is depleted soil that is more prone to wind and water erosion and less able to grow crops.[34] Compost helps reverse this damage. Finished compost adds organic matter and microbes that build soil health and improve the water-holding capacity of soil, making it more resistant to drought, erosion, and flooding. For every 1,000 tons of diverted food scraps and yard trimmings, 1.2 million gallons of water is saved, which is the equivalent of eight Colorado households' worth of water use per year according to CDPHE's Colorado Organics Infrastructure Toolkit.[35]

As shown in Table 3, if all of the food scraps and yard trimmings composted in Colorado in 2025 had been applied to agricultural land, roughly 435 million gallons of irrigation water would have been saved, equal to the annual water use of almost 3,000 households. **If the food scraps and yard trimmings that were landfilled in 2025 had instead been composted and applied to agricultural land as well, the state would have saved 2.5 billion gallons of irrigation water.**[36]

Table 3

Potential Water Savings from Applying Compost* to Agricultural Lands in Colorado[37]



	Tons of food scraps and yard trimmings/ wood	Gallons of irrigation water that could be saved if the food and yard trimmings were composted and applied to Colorado agricultural lands	Equivalent households' worth of water saved[38]
Organics composted in 2025	373,743	434,663,109	2,898
Organics landfilled in 2025	1,521,518	2,465,406,098	16,436
Combined total organics composted and landfilled in 2025	1,895,261	2,900,069,207	19,334

**Although mulch applied to soil helps retain moisture and regulate soil temperature, water savings from mulched yard trimmings and wood that are not later composted are not reflected in this table because the state's water savings model counts only fully composted organics.*

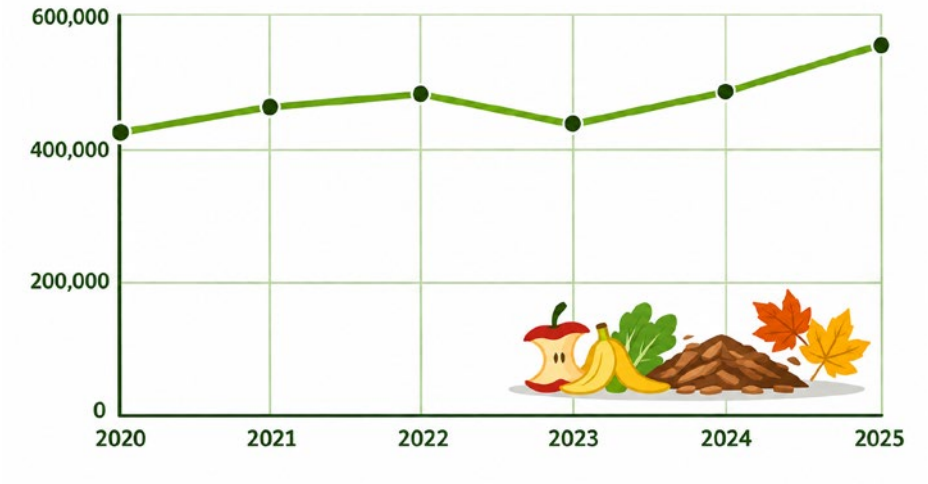


Colorado's Compost Economy Is Stepping Up

Colorado has a growing compost economy, which is expanding to meet the needs of the state. In recent years, Colorado adopted two laws that create tax incentives for using compost on agricultural lands (HB24-1249 and SB25-026), and CDPHE updated regulations to make it easier and cheaper to permit new compost facilities. As shown in figure 1, the amount of organic materials diverted through composting in Colorado has continued to slowly and steadily increase.[39]

Figure 1

Amount of Food Scraps and Yard Trimmings/Wood Diverted Through Composting and Mulching in Colorado[40]

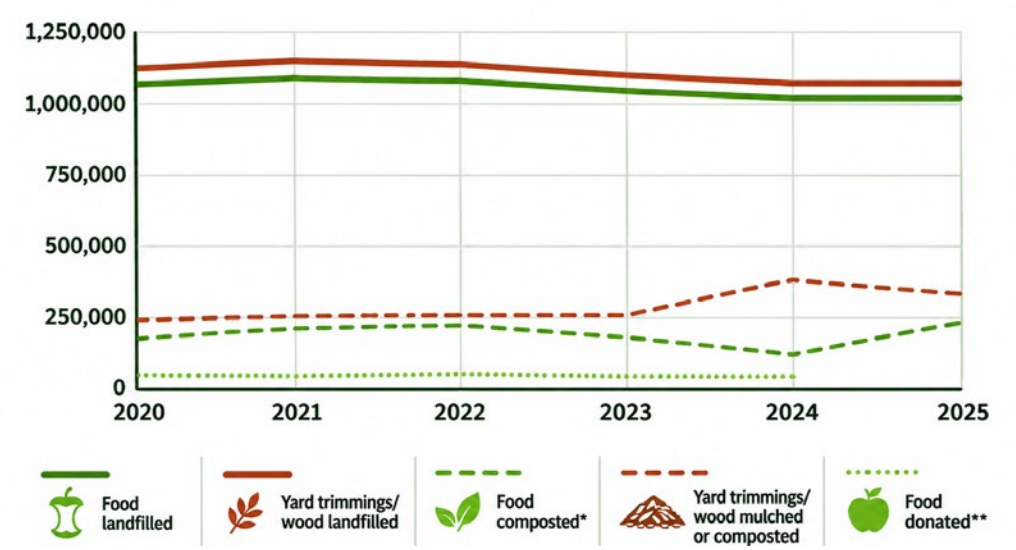


However, even with the gradual growth in composting, there is tremendous work still needed to bridge the gap between the organics that are being wasted by burying them in the landfill and the organic resources that are being recovered through donation of edible food and composting or mulching of nonedible organic materials. We are working toward creating a system for all of Colorado that diverts organic resources from landfills and uses them to feed people, improve soil health, mitigate climate change, and strengthen local economies.

Figure 2

Gaps in Organics Management in Colorado—Landfilling Still Far Outpaces Diversion Through Donation of Edible Food, or Composting or Mulching of Nonedible Organics

For years, Colorado has consistently and overwhelmingly landfilled more organic materials compared to composting or edible food donations. Colorado needs to continue to support policies and invest in programs and infrastructure to dramatically increase our recovery of valuable organic resources.[41]



** In 2024, the amount of food scraps composted appeared to dip significantly due to corrections in how a couple of large processors reported tonnages.*[42]

*** Food donation data for 2025 not available at the time the report was published.*

Recent Organics Diversion and Data Reporting in Colorado

For the second year in a row, Colorado increased the total amount of organic material diverted from landfills through composting and mulching. Food scraps composted rose significantly, from 110,000 tons in 2024 to 235,000 tons in 2025.[43] According to CDPHE, part of the increase comes from the growth of small-scale composting businesses across the state. Much of it, though, comes from the expansion of composting operations at the **Denver Arapahoe Disposal Site (DADS)**, which processes the material collected through **Denver**'s newly expanded residential composting program.[44]

Woody material followed a different path. In 2024, chipping of woody material (such as tree branches, wildfire mitigation material, pallets, and clean construction lumber) rose markedly thanks to new processors in the state. Tons reported in 2025 were slightly down from 2024 (see table above).[45] Reporting in this category varies each

year depending on which entities report. The numbers CDPHE publishes for composted "yard trimmings/wood" fell from 173,000 tons in 2024 to 140,000 tons in 2025, largely because of one facility. That facility reported far fewer grass clippings and appears to have changed how it categorizes materials, so less material shows up as "yard trimmings/wood" and more as "food scraps." Reported figures also likely understate woody material diversion, because most data comes from central chipping facilities, while wood chipped onsite, left in place to decompose, or burned in place is not counted as diverted from landfill.[46]

Organics are resources— and how we refer to them matters!



Organic materials, such as edible food, food scraps, and yard trimmings, **aren't waste**— they are valuable resources. The language we use shapes how we treat **these materials,** so we use the following terms with intention throughout this report.

Organic materials	Anything that was recently living that can be composted, including food scraps and yard trimmings. (Cardboard and paper are also plant-based and therefore count as "organic materials" that should be recycled)
Surplus food	The unsold food in fields and at farms, stores, events, and other locations that is perfectly good for people to eat
Food scraps	Discarded food and food byproducts, such as banana peels, coffee grounds, and spoiled food
Yard trimmings	Any vegetative material generated in the landscape, such as grass clippings, leaves, weeds, and shrub and tree prunings (including slash)
Composting	The process of decomposing organic materials via heat and microbes
Compost	The finished product as a result of the composting process, which is used to amend soils
Slash	Woody organic material (such as trees or shrubs) resulting from logging, forestry management, landscaping projects, and fire mitigation
Waste, organic waste, food waste, yard waste	Organics only become waste when their value is lost by being landfilled or incinerated. Organic waste should always be avoided!

Table 4

Tons of Organics Reported as Diverted in Colorado via Composting or Mulching[47]

	2023	2024	2025
Yard trimmings/wood mulched	105,922	200,614	188,417
Yard trimmings/wood composted	143,640	172,554	138,630
Food scraps composted	184,741	109,832	235,113
Total tons diverted	**434,303**	**483,000**	**562,160**



Local Organics Progress in the Past Year

In the past year, communities and businesses have made major investments in compost programs, infrastructure, and policies.[48]

- In 2025, **CDPHE** undertook a rulemaking process to update landfill regulations to minimize greenhouse gases and toxic air emissions. The resulting Regulation 31 will require more landfills to install gas collection and control systems and to fix gas leaks, among other requirements. The **Air Quality Control Commission** adopted the rule unanimously in December 2025. During the 2026 legislative session, Senate Bill 26-101 was introduced, which would have created compliance loopholes for landfills. Eco-Cycle and our allies helped turn this bill into something mutually beneficial for environmental groups and landfill operators by allowing operators to access certain grant programs. Additionally, CDPHE launched a $14 million grant program to help publicly owned landfills pay for upgrades required to comply with Regulation 31.
- In 2026, the **Colorado Circular Communities Enterprise (C3)** provided grants to **Elements Mountain Compost** in Salida, **See Me Compost** in Steamboat Springs, **Compost Junction** in Grand Junction, **Table to Farm Compost** in Durango, and **Delta Compost** in Delta County to help Colorado companies expand composting solutions.[49] For example, Delta Compost received over $1 million from C3 to start food scraps collection in parts of rural western Colorado that did not have those services. The grant will also fund a trommel screen, which sifts compost through a rotating drum to help retain moisture in their final product, and machinery needed to deliver and spread large amounts of compost on agricultural land.[50]
- Municipalities are supporting organics generators to expand commercial composting. The **Town of Vail** is providing a subsidy of $8 per household per month while funds last to expand curbside residential compost access beyond West Vail to provide town-wide access to curbside compost. This expansion complements Vail's business composting rebate program. The **Town of Avon** launched a Commercial Composting Pilot Program serving 8 local restaurants and diverting approximately 22 tons of organic materials (as of September 2026)

while maintaining very low contamination rates and demonstrating that commercial composting can be successfully integrated into restaurant operations with training and technical support.

- Local governments are leveraging partnerships to make organics diversion easier for residents by adding drop-off locations and events. The **City of Steamboat Springs** partnered with **Routt County Wildfire Mitigation Council**, **Steamboat Resort**, **SavATree**, and **Apex Waste** to provide two slash chipping events as a means to encourage hazard mitigation and divert the biomass from the landfill. The events provided 180 cubic yards of mulch to compost processors and local ranchers. The **City of Lakewood** is partnering with **Compost Colorado** to offer food scrap drop-off sites that residents can participate in for $5 per month. Lakewood also hosted five composting and gardening workshops with **Denver Urban Gardens** in 2026, and added compost hauling for a few new city buildings in 2026. The **Town of Erie** added food scrap collection at the recycling center and worked with **Wompost** (now merged with Compost Colorado under 5280 Waste Solutions) to expand compost collections. Erie contracts with a third party to get better density out of collection containers by compressing materials in roll-offs, which helps them maintain service and reduce hauling frequency, emissions, and cost. The **Town of Mountain Village** has partnered with **Bruin Waste Management** and **Delta Composting** to offer residential composting to all households.
- **Montezuma County Landfill** has expanded its compost operations tenfold in recent years and will now be adding food scrap composting thanks to new compost hauler **MoCo Compost**.[51]



- Over the past 12 months, the **City and County of Denver** has continued to expand its residential compost collection program. To date, 80,400 Denver households are participating, an increase of 51,000 since the start of the expansion in 2023. The expanded program has diverted 67,656 tons of food scraps and yard trimmings from the landfill from January 2023 to September 2026.[52] Composting this amount of organic material reduces greenhouse gases equivalent to removing 2,091 passenger vehicles from the road for a year or conserving 1,108,635 gallons of gasoline.[53]

Colorado Compost Champions

Meet a group of champions driving Colorado's circular solutions for organics recovery



Members of COCC presented a skit about local compost policy solutions at the annual Recycle Colorado Summit

Members of the Colorado Composting Council (COCC)

COCC is a council of Recycle Colorado and the Colorado chapter of the US Composting Council

Members of the Colorado Composting Council (COCC) champion organics diversion and the creation and use of clean compost to build healthy soils across Colorado. Members include local governments, nonprofit groups, students, and large and small composting businesses from across Colorado. Through collaboration, research, and education, COCC members advance composting best practices, share the benefits of compost with professionals and the public, and advocate for policies and programs that expand organics diversion and compost use statewide. In 2026, the US Composting Council recognized COCC's leadership and collective impact with its Chapter of Excellence Award, honoring the council's ongoing efforts to advance composting throughout Colorado.

What's Next for Organics Diversion

An Organics Resource Recovery Law

Colorado needs a state-level organics resource recovery law that requires large generators of organic materials to divert edible food through donations, and divert food scraps and woody materials like trees to be made into compost and mulch. By requiring organics to be diverted, Colorado will keep organics out of landfills and prevent the resulting methane emissions. It will also help fight food insecurity and create a steady stream of organic materials that compost processors need to continue to develop composting infrastructure statewide. Supporting the buildout of composting infrastructure will create reliable market availability of finished compost to meet the needs of Colorado infrastructure and agriculture.

Mandated Cardboard Diversion

Cardboard is plant-based, just like food scraps and yard trimmings. When it is buried in a landfill, it not only takes up valuable space but also decomposes without oxygen and produces methane. There is no reason to send cardboard to landfills since it is so commonly recyclable across Colorado, especially with the new Producer Responsibility law. We have the opportunity to make statewide change by requiring that cardboard be diverted from landfills. Diversion requirements in Colorado are not new; the City of Fort Collins enacted a cardboard diversion requirement in 2013.



Widespread Compost Application for Full Benefits

We need the State and local communities to commit to using local compost and mulch. The soil-carbon sequestration and water-saving benefits of composting are only fully realized when compost is applied to soils. Local farmers, governments, schools, businesses, and individuals can "close the loop" on organics by buying and using finished compost to amend soils in infrastructure projects and public spaces. Local governments can ensure this happens by adopting a policy that requires the use of local compost and mulch in infrastructure and landscaping projects. Buying compost supports local compost businesses, which in turn leads to the development of more composting infrastructure.

Expanded Compost Infrastructure

We need to continue building out a multi-scale Local Compost Network. This includes everything from individuals composting in their backyard, to local on-farm and on-site composting operations, to large-scale regional compost manufacturers. The system links organics collection and processing at multiple scales with local soil application of finished products. This connected network keeps nutrients circulating locally, while supporting jobs and healthy soils.

Comprehensive Compost Education

Finally, we need community-wide education so that legislators, farmers, landscapers, municipal staff, and residents understand why keeping organics out of landfills, making compost, and using it well are important. Education helps people connect what they put in the bin at the curb to the farmers and landscapers who manufacture or receive the finished compost, and underscores why keeping contaminants (such as plastic) out of their bin is essential. When residents see their compost cart not as a waste bin but as a soil-making machine, they set out cleaner, higher-quality material that makes better compost.

Recycling

A robust, transparent, and trustworthy recycling system is a crucial piece of a circular economy. Recycling saves water and energy and reduces greenhouse gases while decreasing demand for natural resources. We need an effective recycling system that people can trust to recover materials at the end of their useful lives and return them to circulation as new products.

Statewide Progress: Colorado's Producer Responsibility for Packaging and Paper Program Begins to Deliver

After four years of planning and development, our state's Producer Responsibility program for paper and packaging started implementing free access to recycling in 2026. The program requires companies to cover the costs of recycling for the packaging and paper they produce. **Eco-Cycle** and **CoPIRG** helped pass this law in 2022 and have continued to advocate to make sure its implementation delivers on its goals of providing free, easy access to recycling for all Coloradans. We are also working to ensure that the recycling system is one Coloradans can trust to turn recyclable packaging into new products.

As Producer Responsibility rolls out, we will continue to see big changes in our recycling system. In December 2025, **CDPHE** approved the first program plan for Producer Responsibility for packaging. The plan details how **Circular Action Alliance (CAA)**, the nonprofit tasked with implementing the program for packaging recycling (cans, paper, boxes, bottles, jars, etc.) will work with local governments and recycling service providers to offer free recycling for residents, paid for by the companies that create packaging and paper.

By 2035, Producer Responsibility in Colorado is predicted to double the amount of packaging recycled in Colorado, resulting in a reduction in annual greenhouse gas emissions equivalent to removing 278,000 cars from the road.

Protecting Natural Resources and the Climate

While Producer Responsibility aims to increase the recycling of packaging and paper, it also financially incentivizes producers to use less packaging, incorporate higher amounts of recycled content, and design for recycling and reuse. By reducing the amount of natural resources we consume, and keeping those that are extracted in use for as long as possible, we reduce the impacts of extraction, production, and disposal on people and the planet. By 2035, Producer Responsibility in Colorado is predicted to double the amount of packaging recycled in Colorado, resulting in a reduction in annual greenhouse gas emissions equivalent to removing 278,000 cars from the road.[54]

True Accountability for Authentic Recycling

After submitting significant public comment, advocates for authentic recycling in the state celebrated CDPHE's decision to approve a plan that requires the

system to track recycled content in a way that is transparent and verifiable.[55] This decision also prohibits misleading accounting methods, such as free allocation, that leave room for bad actors in the plastics industry to count plastics turned into fuel as recycled content.

The Benefits Begin

Circular Action Alliance (CAA) is actively contracting with local governments and recycling service providers to reimburse recycling costs, and many more negotiations are in process.[56] Securing these initial agreements has been a slow process as this new system is being created and important details are being negotiated on all sides. By 2030, the rollout will expand recycling to 700,000 additional households.[57]

In July 2026, CAA launched a statewide education campaign, RecycleOn Colorado. The program will create a consistent, convenient statewide recycling system that will allow Coloradans to recycle the same materials wherever they are in the state. In addition to CAA's statewide RecycleOn Colorado ad campaign, CAA is giving money to haulers and local governments to educate people about recycling and composting—particularly important in communities new to recycling.

In addition to the CAA program, Interchange 360 is rolling out collection services for automotive lubricant packaging (see page 22 for details on Interchange 360).

Legal Challenges

At the time of releasing this report, there are two pending lawsuits against CDPHE with regard to Colorado's Producer Responsibility for Packaging program: one brought by the National Association of Wholesalers (NAW) and one by the Independent Lubricant Manufacturers Association (ILMA), that are in the early stages of the legal process; Eco-Cycle has submitted amicus briefs in defense of Colorado's program in both lawsuits. A similar lawsuit in Oregon by the NAW was decided in the State's favor earlier this fall; additionally, there are pending lawsuits in California.[58] **Colorado's Attorney General's Office** regularly provides updates on the status of the lawsuits in Colorado during monthly Producer Responsibility Advisory Board meetings, which are open to the public.[59]

Local Recycling Progress in the Past Year

In the past year, we've seen communities across Colorado step up to prepare for Producer Responsibility and improve their recycling systems.[60]

- The **City of Golden** is leveraging various sources of funding to take big steps forward. Golden has won grants from the **Colorado Energy Office** Local IMPACT Accelerator, CDPHE's Colorado Circular Communities enterprise grant, and secured funds from CAA to pay for education and outreach programs, all of which will improve its recycling systems in the near future.[61]

- The **City and County of Denver**'s Universal Recycling and Composting Ordinance (URCO) went into effect in September 2026, requiring recycling and composting services at multifamily residential buildings, food businesses, and permitted events, as well as recycling for nonresidential buildings and permitted construction & demolition projects. URCO covers 3,000 food businesses and over 11,000 buildings, representing about 170,000 residential units.
- The **City of Brighton** passed an ordinance requiring trash and recycling haulers to obtain a license to operate in the city, and requiring haulers to automatically provide recycling to all their single-family and multifamily customers at no cost as long as Producer Responsibility is available to cover the cost. This makes Brighton the first city with an open-market waste collection system (no hauler contract or municipally operated recycling trucks) in Colorado to require free recycling. The new ordinance ensures all Brighton residents will receive free recycling services as long as the costs can be covered by Producer Responsibility.
- The **Town of Grand Lake** and **Grand Resource and Recycle Coalition** are holding drop-off recycling collection events to complement the already successful Pay-As-You-Throw trash program.
- The **City of Longmont** continued to see an increase in commercial diversion during its second year of Universal Recycling Ordinance implementation. Commercial diversion is up to 62% compared to 59% last year and 35% prior to implementation.
- Across the state, we're seeing big investments in recycling infrastructure. **WM** opened a large new Materials Recovery Facility (MRF) in Aurora in 2026, and **Grand Junction** is reported to be on schedule to open its new MRF in early 2027.[62] Smaller recycling businesses are likewise expanding operations and investing in recycling infrastructure to help provide recycling services to Colorado residents under the Producer Responsibility system.

Correction: In the 2025 State of Recycling and Composting Report, we incorrectly stated that Steamboat Springs City Council had passed a Pay-As-You-Throw, or volume-based pricing, requirement to add to their hauler licensing ordinance. The Steamboat Springs City Council gave direction to staff to draft such an ordinance, but has not voted on or approved it. Steamboat Springs is focusing on implementing Producer Responsibility to see how it impacts the City's recycling.

Colorado Recycling Champion

Meet one of the many champions driving Colorado's circular solutions for recycling.



Nicole Manesh

Zero Waste Sustainability Coordinator, City of Longmont

"I have always been passionate about the environment and believe that progressing our recycling systems and Zero Waste programs will help ensure a healthy and enjoyable environment. Recycling and sorting your waste are small things that everyone can do, with a little bit of practice and waste education, to contribute to the bigger picture. I led the successful implementation of Longmont's Universal Recycling Ordinance, where we are now reporting a commercial diversion rate of 62%. To achieve this, we focused on having waste education and outreach, accessible bilingual materials, and financial assistance available. Today, we are exploring a Construction and Deconstruction (C&D) ordinance, are part of the Boulder County C&D Cohort, and are working on a two-year waste education campaign with Eco-Cycle. If you are not for zero waste, how much waste are you for?"

What's Next in Packaging Recycling

Colorado's implementation of Producer Responsibility for packaging is driving major investments in recycling collection and processing, creating green jobs and needed services across the state. While this program continues to make significant changes to our recycling system, Eco-Cycle, CoPIRG, and our allies will keep advocating for trustworthy, reliable recycling and reducing toxic chemicals that are used in our packaging.

Recycling
Hard-to-Recycle Materials

While Producer Responsibility for packaging is building out access for recycling common recyclables, Colorado has even fewer options when it comes to collecting, processing, and recycling hard-to-recycle (HTR) and household hazardous waste (HHW) materials. Things like electronics, batteries, paint, and automotive containers can be hazardous or start fires if sent to the landfill or through single-stream recycling. Colorado has made exciting progress in the past few years to build out systems, funded by producers, that make it easier to recycle some of these hard-to-recycle and hazardous materials, and we need to continue to work on more solutions to serve residents in more parts of the state.

Statewide Progress: Steady Expansion of Producer Responsibility Programs for Hard-to-Recycle Materials

Colorado's **PaintCare** program has provided a successful model of Producer Responsibility, improving access and ease of recycling since 2015. In 2025, PaintCare collected 785,259 gallons of paint and recycled 85% of latex paint that was collected. Today, 96.8% of Colorado residents live within 15 miles of a drop-off site.[63] This program has changed the system for recycling paint across Colorado and many other states.

In 2025, based on the successful PaintCare model, Eco-Cycle and other partners such as **Recycle Colorado** helped pass a battery stewardship law (SB25-163) for loose batteries. It requires battery producers to fund the safe collection and recycling of small- and medium-format batteries, including button, AAA, D-cell, rechargeable power-tool batteries, and e-bike batteries. This program is getting off the ground and will soon cover the costs of battery recycling for communities across the state.[64]

Most recently, Colorado added a new program for electric vehicle (EV) batteries. In 2026, the **Union of Concerned Scientists** and **Western Resource Advocates** championed SB26-003, which creates a system to collect and recycle EV batteries. As Coloradans increasingly switch to EVs, demand grows for critical minerals—such as lithium and cobalt—to power these vehicles. Recycling recaptures these valuable materials into the supply chain. The law requires car manufacturers to collect and recycle unwanted EV batteries and educate the public. It also emphasizes reusing EV batteries prior to recycling, building on existing free-market pathways, and requires EV battery producers to label EV batteries with information to make them easier to recycle. This creates a national model other states can follow.

As part of Colorado's Producer Responsibility program for packaging and paper, **Interchange 360** launched a drop-off collection program in 2026 for petroleum and automotive product containers. It provides a pathway



Interchange 360 has launched an education campaign encouraging proper recycling of automotive lubricant packaging.

for collecting and recycling empty automotive containers, including motor oil, antifreeze, and diesel exhaust fluid containers, automotive aerosol products, and other petroleum-related packaging. As part of this program, **Janus Enterprises LLC,** through its Oilpkup HDPE Division, has become Colorado's first processor dedicated specifically to HDPE lubricant and automotive packaging, with a new facility in Cañon City. Automotive product packaging should never be put into curbside recycling, as the products contained within the packaging contaminate the materials of the packaging itself, making these materials unsuitable for recycling into new food-grade packaging. Having a dedicated collection and recycling system allows them to be recycled into new packaging for non-food items and other products, while preventing contamination of other clean recycling streams.

Local Hard-to-Recycle Progress in the Past Year

In the past year, communities and businesses have made progress in expanding circular pathways for hard-to-recycle materials outside of the Producer Responsibility programs listed above.[65]

- Two efforts are increasing recycling of expanded polystyrene (EPS, sometimes inaccurately called Styrofoam®). The **Town of Avon** opened EPS collection and recycling to the public in March 2025. In Boulder, Eco-Cycle received a C3 grant to replace the densifier in use at the **Eco-Cycle/City of Boulder Center for Hard-to-Recycle Materials (CHaRM).** The new, larger unit will allow for significantly increased EPS processing received from individuals and businesses. Eco-Cycle will then redeploy its previous densifier so that another nonprofit or municipality can use it to increase EPS collection in Colorado.
- **Apex Waste Solutions, Western Resilience Center, City of Steamboat Springs,** and **Routt County** partnered to strategize an expansion of materials accepted for recycling at their transfer station within city limits. Apex renamed the transfer station Apex SHIFT (Steamboat Hard-to-recycle Items Facility & Transfer) Center and expanded their program to accept electronics, batteries, fluorescent bulbs, baling twine, source-separated cardboard, and paint via the PaintCare program.



Colorado Hard-to-Recycle Champion

Meet one of the many champions driving Colorado's circular solutions for recycling hard-to-recycle materials.



Shelly Fuller
Director of Operations, Interchange 360 and former Hazardous Materials Program Manager for Boulder County

"After 17 years in the household hazardous waste industry, I've had the opportunity to be part of one of the most exciting shifts in our field: expanding recycling opportunities through Producer Responsibility and petroleum and automotive container recycling. What inspires me most is helping transform materials that were once considered waste into valuable resources. Seeing Colorado lead the way and serve as a model for other states demonstrates how innovative thinking and collaboration can create lasting environmental impacts. It's incredibly rewarding to know our work is helping shape the future of recycling across the country."

What's Next for Hard-to-Recycle Materials

We need to ensure that the small- and medium-format battery and EV battery stewardship laws are fully implemented so that Coloradans have access to safe, producer-funded battery recycling. Next, all Coloradans need access to safe and responsible recycling for electronics, including those with embedded batteries (e.g., cell phones, light-up shoes, and electronic smoking devices or vapes). A number of states are working on model language for an updated approach to Producer Responsibility for electronics and embedded-battery device recycling, which could help inform future policy action in Colorado.

The State should also consider Producer Responsibility laws for other problematic materials such as mattresses, carpets, household hazardous materials, and pharmaceuticals, as are currently in place in many other US states.

Reuse

REUSE

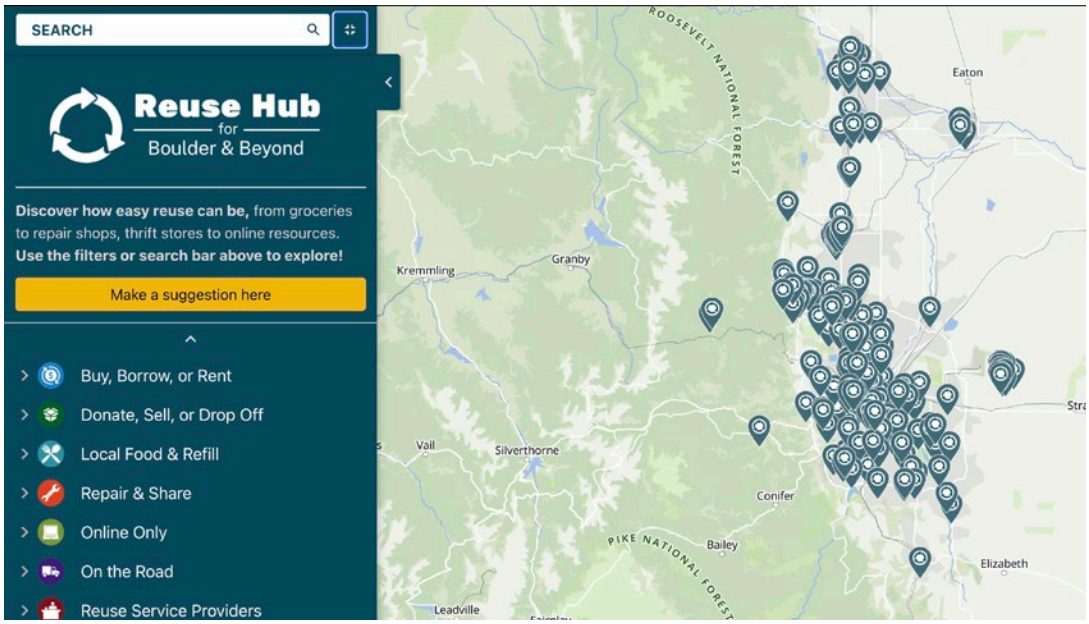
PR3, the Global Alliance to Advance Reuse, an international coalition collaborating on the development of reuse standards, unveiled the universal reuse symbol in June of 2026.

Creating systems for reusing materials for as long as possible is key to creating a circular economy and reducing waste. Reuse systems focus on high-quality, durable resources that are made to be used more than once. Reuse stands in contrast to the culture of using disposable, single-use items that pollute our environment and waste money. While single-use items are marketed as convenient, the Zero Waste movement shows that reducing waste and reusing materials are worth the effort for the environment, health, and reducing costs, and can be as convenient as single-use.

Local Reuse Progress in the Past Year

In the past year, communities, organizations, and businesses have made exciting progress in the reuse space.[66]

- The **City of Boulder** and **Eco-Cycle** partnered to create the Reuse Hub for Boulder & Beyond**,** an online repository of resources and information to promote reuse in Boulder County and along the Northern Front Range. Our interactive map highlights businesses—including refill groceries, repair services, thrift shops, secondhand stores, used furniture stores, and restaurants with reusable to-go containers—that are helping reimagine community systems to make reuse the norm and disposables a thing of the past.



The interactive City of Boulder and Eco-Cycle Reuse Hub map highlights businesses in Boulder County and along the Northern Front Range that are helping reimagine community systems to make reuse the norm and disposables a thing of the past. The map features an option for individuals to suggest additional businesses to be included on the map.

- Buildings across Colorado are full of high-quality lumber that is often demolished and landfilled instead of being reused. Recycle Colorado's Construction and Deconstruction (C&D) Council prioritized finding pathways to recover and reuse more salvaged lumber in 2025. As part of their advocacy work, the C&D Council encouraged building code officials from across Colorado to submit comments to the **International Code Council** (ICC) to include allowances for using salvaged lumber. Advocacy from across Colorado helped result in the ICC adopting allowances for using salvage lumber in its 2027 building code update.[67]

- Colorado's Right to Repair law for electronics (HB24-1121), championed by **CoPIRG**, began implementation in January 2026. This led mission-based electronics recycler **Blue Star Recyclers** to expand its reuse-first approach through its IT Asset Disposition (ITAD) and refurbishment operations. Expanding its refurbishment work creates even more opportunities for neurodivergent technicians to build skills in complex technology repair, device testing, and secure data destruction.[68] The Right to Repair for electronics law allows for greater access to manufacturer parts, repair information, and diagnostic tools. This will help Blue Star and others to repair and redeploy more devices rather than breaking them down for raw material recycling. Repairing electronics allows more devices to stay in use and out of the waste stream, adding to a stock of affordable refurbished devices.



- An often-overlooked aspect of waste reduction is creating the systems and empowering individuals to repair materials that otherwise might be discarded. This year, the **Cities of Littleton, Englewood,** and **Sheridan** collaborated to create the Tri-Cities Repair Fair.[69] Repair fairs are events where repair experts teach the public how to repair common materials, such as zippers and basic electronics. The **Town of Silverthorne** is also piloting a series of twelve free reuse classes called the Art of Repair.

- The **Town of Breckenridge** partnered with nonprofit **Retrocycle** to launch a reusable hot and cold cup program in cafes throughout town. Since launching the pilot in May, Retrocycle has been expanding to cafes across Colorado, building a network of cafes offering the "Colorado Cup experience." As of releasing this report, Retrocycle is also in cafes in the towns of **Frisco, Dillon,** and **Silverthorne** and the cities of **Boulder, Lafayette, Louisville,** and **Longmont.**[70]

- The **Town of Vail** launched a "Better than Bottled" campaign featuring bottle filling stations in Vail Village and Lionshead, with a goal of encouraging more reusable water bottles and fewer single-use plastics. This program adds to Vail's existing reuse programs, such as the Vail Recycling Center's ongoing ski/snowboard exchange area where people can drop off or pick up unwanted snow-sports equipment free of charge.

- The independent library district in **Adams County** opened the **Anythink Nature Library** in Thornton on August 8, 2026. The library will offer outdoor gear, like backpacks, snowshoes, and binoculars, for people to check out just like books. All eight of the Anythink libraries (and more than 300 libraries around the state) are part of **Colorado Parks and Wildlife's** Outdoor Explorer Backpack Program, which offers a backpack stocked with nature guidebooks, binoculars, magnifying glasses, bug boxes, and free entry to Colorado's state parks.[71]

Colorado Reuse Champions

Meet two of the many champions creating reuse solutions in Colorado.



Meredith Katz & Joey Baugh
Founders of Retrocycle

"We started Retrocycle because we both believe a circular future for to-go foodware is possible. We've seen how much Coloradans care about protecting this place we call home, and our mission is to make it easier to turn that care into everyday action. To us, behavior change starts with building the systems that support it. With eight municipalities and more than a dozen cafés working together, that vision is taking shape. Colorado is showing that we can do to-go differently, and make reuse an easy part of everyday life. Every person who has borrowed and returned a cup, and every café that has joined the network, is helping champion that future alongside us."

What's Next for Reuse in Colorado

Local governments can be proving grounds for reuse pilots and projects. For example, **Partners for a Clean Environment** (PACE) provides resources and education to empower restaurants in Boulder County to purchase reusable dining ware for in-house dining, resulting in fewer single-use items and cost savings for businesses.[72] Local governments can incentivize businesses to switch to reusables, contract or provide technical support to help businesses switch to reusables, promote reuse at government buildings and events, lead by example through enacting sustainable procurement policies, invest in more water refill stations, and provide financial support for reusable trays and serviceware in schools.

The State can lead by example and adopt procurement policies and event requirements that prioritize reuse. The State could update its purchasing policies to promote reuse and repair requirements and green certifications. The State can also adopt guidelines that prioritize reuse for food serviceware items in offices and at events. Additionally, the State could save money by creating an inventory of office equipment to be shared or reused among departments, minimizing the need for additional purchasing. Multiple companies are working in this space, helping other states and municipalities manage this type of equipment sharing.

Reducing Waste and Consumption

Zero Waste is a set of practices and ideas aimed at conserving resources and reducing the negative impacts of consumption. While recycling and composting are better options to manage materials than sending them to a landfill, it is environmentally and economically preferable to reduce waste from the start. The best way to manage waste is to make less of it in the first place.



Communities across Colorado are finding creative ways to reduce unnecessary single-use items. The **City and County of Denver** reported a 99% reduction in single-use plastic checkout bags since it adopted its Disposable Bag Fee in 2021 (from 29,623,936 in 2022 down to 51,623 in 2025).[73] Denverites used five million fewer plastic bags in 2025 than in 2024. As other communities comply with the 2021 Plastic Pollution Reduction Act, they are reporting less single-use plastic and paper bag consumption, while collecting fees from paper bags that fund waste reduction and sustainability efforts.

Statewide Progress: Legislative Efforts to Reduce Waste

- In 2026, the legislature passed "Skip the Stuff" (SB26-146), which would have required restaurants to ask customers whether they want single-use foodware accessories such as utensils, condiment packets, and straws. This type of policy, which has been adopted in several Colorado communities and other states, saves restaurants money while reducing unnecessary waste. Customers still have the option to request these items if needed. It builds on the **Plastic Pollution Reduction Act** (PPRA), which has successfully reduced billions of plastic bags in Colorado, saving businesses money and reducing costs to governments to deal with litter and improperly disposed-of plastic items.[74] While the Colorado legislature passed the Skip the Stuff bill, Governor Polis vetoed the bill for reasons that advocates think were unwarranted.
- In 2026, the legislature passed SB26-016, a bill to ban the dumping of plastic pellets, the building blocks of all things plastic, into Colorado waterways and communities.[75] An estimated 10 trillion pellets escape into the ocean each year.[76] Every plastic pellet that has ever been spilled or washed into our waters is likely out there in some form or another because pellets can take anywhere from 100 to 1,000 years to break down.[77]

Local Progress in Reducing Waste in the Past Year

There is a lot of overlap in the beneficial impacts of reusing and reducing waste, so the local community examples are combined in this report. See Reuse Progress section (page 25) for local examples of communities reducing waste in conjunction with reuse programs.

Colorado Reuse Champions

Meet two of the many champions creating reuse solutions in Colorado.



Dominick and Erica with Rep. Meg Froelich, one of the prime sponsors of SB26-146

Erica Choi and Dominick Redmond
Cherry Creek High School students

"We were inspired to lead the 2026 Skip the Stuff bill (SB26-146) after determining that we wanted to make a positive environmental impact in our communities through political advocacy. We went door-to-door at dozens of restaurants to collect feedback, mobilized other students to testify, and presented our findings and arguments to legislative committees. Although we had no prior experience with state-level politics and were only high school students, our determination and enthusiasm championed this legislative effort. This passion and ardency for environmental change continued into the new legislative session, as we hope to have the Skip the Stuff bill signed into law in 2027. By choosing 'Not to be rough and Skip the Stuff,' a greener future will be promised to Colorado."

What's Next for Waste Reduction in Colorado



Since Skip the Stuff was vetoed in 2026, we are calling for the next legislature and governor to pass this policy and sign it into law. Eco-Cycle has created a petition to collect signatures from residents across Colorado calling for the next legislature and governor to sign Skip the Stuff into law. This petition has hundreds of signatures from Coloradans who want to see action!

Colorado can also build on its leadership as a Right to Repair state—extending protections to those electronic products that are not yet covered and protecting the current statutes that allow Coloradans to access the tools, parts, and diagnostics they need to fix their electronics.[78] In addition, Colorado legislators could push back on planned obsolescence by requiring manufacturers to publish a repair score that rates their products. This would give consumers the ability to know if a product is fixable, empowering consumers to purchase repairable products and encouraging companies to build devices designed to last.

Finally, Colorado could create minimum service dates for access to repair and parts—a length of time companies are required to provide this access. Laptops, phones, tablets, and appliances that cost hundreds, if not thousands, of dollars should be usable and repairable for as long as possible, not disposable due to a lack of spare parts and service information.

SECTION 3

Priorities for the Future



In this section

32 What's Next: A Call to Action for Governor-Elect Weiser and the 76th General Assembly

What's Next: A Call to Action for Governor-Elect Weiser and the 76th General Assembly

Note to local governments: Many of these recommendations can also be adopted at the county or municipal level.

Colorado has made significant strides, and it is ready for its next chapter. We call on Governor-Elect Weiser and state legislators to build on the momentum of the last 10 years and make the next decade the one where Colorado truly becomes a national leader in Zero Waste and the circular economy.

The state has laid the groundwork for progress, with a $26 million state grant program, Colorado Circular Communities Enterprise, which continues to empower local innovation and provide free technical assistance to municipalities.[79] Additionally, the Colorado Energy Office's Local IMPACT Accelerator grants are providing $8 million in circular economy grants to communities statewide.[80] Local governments across the state are adopting policies, implementing programs, and building infrastructure to divert more materials from landfills through increased recycling and composting. Many are also working to prevent waste in the first place by supporting reuse and phasing out disposables.

Now is the time for Governor-Elect Weiser and the legislature to support these local efforts with state policies and programs that prioritize waste reduction, reuse, recycling, and composting. These proven solutions have many co-benefits such as protecting our climate, conserving natural resources, reducing environmental injustices, building local circular economies, generating local jobs, and creating resilient supply chains.



We need to ensure laws like Producer Responsibility and Right-to-Repair are fully implemented and meet our state's goals. We also need new policies to increase recovery of organic materials through donating edible surplus food and composting food scraps and yard trimmings. We need laws to reduce unnecessary plastics and waste, and to expand Producer Responsibility for hard-to-recycle materials like electronics, devices with embedded batteries like laptops and vapes, mattresses, and carpets.

A Call to Colorado's Next Governor and Legislature

To make Colorado a national leader in the circular economy, we need Governor-Elect Weiser and the Legislature to prioritize recycling, composting, reuse, and waste reduction policies by taking the following actions:

1

Incorporate Zero Waste strategies (recycling, composting, reusing, reducing waste) into the State's climate action plans.

These strategies are some of the most cost-effective and impactful climate solutions governments can implement.[81] Using recycled content instead of extracting and processing virgin materials dramatically reduces energy consumption and thus decreases climate emissions. Additionally, keeping organic materials such as cardboard, food, and yard trimmings out of landfills reduces landfill methane emissions, a potent greenhouse gas.[82] Applying compost and mulch builds healthy soils that sequester carbon from the atmosphere and are more resilient to flooding and drought.[83]

2

Include consumption-based emissions in the greenhouse gas roadmap.

Consumption-based emissions (or "Scope 3 emissions") include all of the greenhouse gases emitted during production, transportation, use, and disposal of the products we consume, regardless of where the emissions are physically released.[84] Leaving Scope 3 emissions out of state models misses a huge portion of Colorado's climate impact. Including these emissions in the state's greenhouse gas roadmap will help Colorado make better informed and more comprehensive climate decisions.

3

Lead by example, starting with state agencies and projects.

The State can achieve massive impacts by taking action and creating replicable models in areas such as expanding reuse, recycling, and composting at state agencies; using compost on state infrastructure projects; deconstructing instead of demolishing state buildings; and using reclaimed materials in new construction. By managing state facilities and buildings with these aims, the state can begin to realize its goals for waste diversion, greenhouse gas reduction, climate and economic resilience, and environmental justice. For example, purchasing compost for state projects is a critical step toward expanding compost markets and infrastructure statewide. Strengthening reliable demand for the finished compost will help compost processors invest in new equipment and facilities to make composting access and finished compost more available statewide. Similarly, implementing reuse systems for items ranging from food serviceware to equipment and building materials can reduce operational costs as well as the material and carbon footprint of the state.[85]

4

Ensure the State's Producer Responsibility programs achieve their goals of delivering equitable access to recycling across all of Colorado, incentivizing better designs for products that minimize waste and toxics and increase the use of postconsumer recycled content, as well as ensuring that materials collected for recycling are verified and transparently tracked to guarantee they are used to make new plastic products.

All Colorado residents, whether they live in rural or urban areas, multifamily or single-family housing, need equitable access to recycling that's as easy as trash collection under the Producer Responsibility for Packaging and Paper Act. The program must also meaningfully incentivize producers to reduce packaging, design packaging without toxic additives, and use more postconsumer recycled content. Additionally, it is of the utmost importance that our recycling system maintains public trust with transparent and accountable tracking and reporting that can verifiably measure the content recycled into new products. It must **not** allow credit methods such as free allocation, as stated in the State's decision regarding postconsumer recycled content.[86] Likewise, the State must ensure that implementation of the battery recycling laws create systems that provide safe collection of batteries and recovery of critical minerals.

5

Expand Colorado Producer Responsibility laws to safely manage materials and strengthen circular supply chains for remanufacturing.

In addition to the Producer Responsibility Program for Packaging and Paper Act, the state has Producer Responsibility laws for paint (SB14-029), small- and medium-format batteries (SB25-163), and EV batteries (SB26-003). While ensuring these programs meet their goals, we should look to adopt Producer Responsibility laws for electronics and embedded-battery-containing devices (including vapes), and for other problematic materials such as mattresses, carpets, household hazardous materials, and pharmaceuticals.

6

Grow our circular organics economy.

We need circular, local-scale systems that divert edible food, food scraps, and yard trimmings from landfills. These are valuable resources. Edible food should be eaten; the rest is feedstock that can be used to make compost, mulch, and other soil amendments that enhance soil health and increase its resilience against flooding and drought. Specifically, the State should adopt a phased organics resource recovery requirement for large generators of discarded food and yard trimmings.

7

Enact policies that strengthen Colorado's Environmental Justice Act (HB21-1266), and ensure that the extraction, processing, and disposal of materials does not disproportionately impact lower-income communities and communities of color.

Reducing environmental health disparities, addressing cumulative impacts, and ensuring the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people in environmental decision-making processes should be priorities for all environmental policymaking.

8

Reduce unnecessary plastic waste.

Reduce waste, and cost to restaurants by adopting a Skip the Stuff law that requires restaurants to get confirmation from customers first before providing items such as single-use utensils, straws, and condiment packets. Require reusable food serviceware at the capitol, in state buildings, and in schools, as well as supporting other reuse policies.

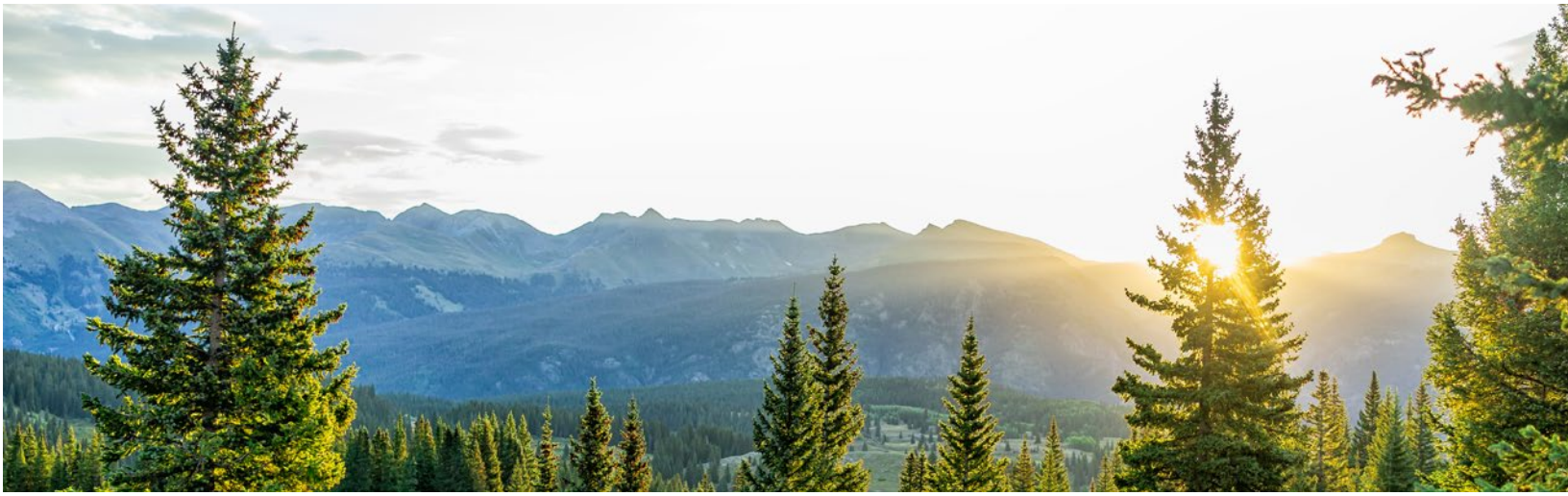
9

Protect Coloradans from toxics in packaging and waste-to-fuel facilities.

Prohibit the inclusion of intentionally added toxics in packaging, similar to 19 other states, through science-based thresholds and an existing national certification. Ensure that no state or taxpayer dollars go to businesses that turn plastics (or other waste) into fuels. Uphold the State's definition of recycling, which does not allow waste-to-fuel to count as recycling. Investing in waste-to-fuel facilities (e.g., plastics-to-fuel, pyrolysis, and gasification) is a false "circular solution" that diverts investment away from proven circular solutions like reuse, design for recycling, source reduction, and mechanical recycling. These facilities disproportionately pollute nearby frontline communities with toxic waste and air pollution.

Colorado's circular economy shows great promise in creating local jobs while reducing the negative impacts of natural resource extraction. With Governor-Elect Weiser's leadership and the support of the legislature, even greater economic, social, and environmental benefits of recycling, composting, and waste reduction can be fully realized.

Appendices



Appendix A:

A Note About Diversion Numbers

This report used to focus on municipal and state diversion rates. But diversion rates (which are calculated by dividing the total amount of waste created by the amount that gets recycled or composted rather than landfilled) don't reflect the impacts of policies that aren't yet fully implemented.

They also don't reflect the waste that was never created, such as the plastic checkout bag that was never produced due to the Plastic Pollution Reduction Act, or the computer that got fixed and resold thanks to Right-to-Repair laws.

As we focus on steering Colorado toward more waste reduction, reuse, recycling, and composting, we're no longer focused on diversion rates. This report is highlighting ways that Colorado is making progress toward a future with less extraction and landfilling of valuable resources, and more Zero Waste solutions for all.

Appendix B

Colorado's Progress in the Last Decade: Local Government Policy Scorecard

In the past 10 years, Colorado communities have stepped up and taken actions to improve our systems for composting, recycling, reusing, and reducing waste. Out of the 37 Colorado municipalities that replied to our survey, Table 5 shows which communities had Zero Waste policies in place prior to 2017 and how many have added policies since 2017. The table also lists which communities have policies now, along with the date the policy was passed or implemented, if known. While this data is incomplete and does not include every community in Colorado, it shows a notable trend that many communities have added impactful policies and programs in the past decade.

Table 5

Local Government Zero Waste Policies Based on Survey Data from 37 Colorado Communities[87]

Compost Policies and Programs	Number of communities that...			List of communities responding to our survey with policies in place (with year passed or implemented, if available)
	had policies before 2017	added policies since 2017	have policies in place as of Sept. 2026	
Requires the use of finished compost and mulch in local government infrastructure and landscaping projects	*	*	3	Broomfield, Lafayette, Longmont
Provides seasonal organics collection events (e.g., leaves, branches, pumpkins, Christmas trees)	At least 1 (Vail), and likely many more	*	29	Arvada, Aspen, Avon, Breckenridge, Broomfield, Centennial, Commerce City, Cortez, Denver, Durango, Englewood, Erie, Fort Collins, Glenwood Springs, Grand Junction, Lafayette, Lakewood, Las Animas, Littleton, Longmont, Louisville, Mountain Village, Sheridan, Silverthorne, Steamboat Springs, Superior, Thornton, Vail (2014), Westminster
Provides a permanent collection site for branches	*	*	18	Aspen, Boulder, Breckenridge, Broomfield, Brush, Denver, Eagle, Erie, Fort Collins, Glenwood Springs, Las Animas, Longmont, Louisville, Mountain Village, Silverthorne, Superior, Thornton, Westminster
Provides (or partners with an external organization to provide) food scrap drop-off sites	*	At least 3	13	Aspen, Avon, Boulder, Breckenridge, Eagle, Englewood (2022), Erie, Fort Collins, Glenwood Springs, Lakewood (2025), Longmont, Silverthorne, Vail (2018)
Provides or requires residential curbside organics collection (food scraps and/or yard trimmings) through municipal hauling or a contract with a hauler	5 (Aspen, Boulder, Lafayette, Louisville, Fort Collins)	At least 6	13	Aspen (2011), Boulder (2015), Cortez, Durango (2021), Denver (2022), Eagle (2023), Fort Collins (2016), Grand Junction, Lafayette (2014), Louisville (2009), Longmont (2017), Superior (2025), Vail (2021)
Requires diversion of organic materials from landfills, or requires businesses and multifamily housing to have composting services	1 (Boulder)	4	5	Aspen (2026), Boulder (2015), Denver (2022), Glenwood Springs (2026), Longmont (2023)

** Policy or program adoption dates unavailable.*

Recycling Policies and Programs	Number of communities that...			List of communities responding to our survey with policies in place (with year passed or implemented, if available)
	had policies before 2017	added policies since 2017	have policies in place as of Sept. 2026	
Guarantees recycling access for all residents through city-run hauling, organized hauling contract, or a hauler licensing requirement	12 (Aspen, Boulder, Cortez, Denver, Durango, Fort Collins, Lafayette, Longmont, Louisville, Mountain Village, Sheridan, Vail)	11	23	Arvada (2020), Aspen (2005), Avon (2022), Boulder (2001), Brighton (2026), Broomfield (2024), Commerce City (2020), Cortez (1991), Denver (1990s), Durango (2013), Eagle (2023), Fort Collins (1991), Glenwood Springs (2023), Grand Junction (2023), Lafayette (2009), Lakewood (2026), Longmont (2010) Louisville (2009), Mountain Village (2009), Sheridan (2014), Steamboat Springs (2021), Superior (2025), Vail (2014)
Requires volume-based pricing (aka Pay-As-You-Throw) for residential trash collection	7 (Boulder, Grand Lake, Fort Collins, Lafayette, Louisville, Sheridan, Vail)	10	17	Arvada (2020), Aspen (2005), Avon (2022), Boulder (2001), Breckenridge (2022), Broomfield (2024), Denver (2022), Erie (2020), Glenwood Springs (2023), Grand Lake (2008), Fort Collins (1998), Lafayette (2007), Longmont (2017), Louisville (2009), Sheridan (2014), Superior (2025), Vail (2014)
Requires multifamily and/or commercial property owners to have recycling services	4 (Boulder, Durango, Mountain Village, Vail)	9	13	Avon (2022), Boulder (2015), Breckenridge (2022), Brighton (2026), Denver (2022), Durango (2013), Fort Collins (2016), Glenwood Springs (2024), Lafayette (2024), Longmont (2023), Mountain Village (2008), Steamboat Springs (2023), Vail (2014)
Requires equal space for recycling and trash bins in new and/or remodeled multifamily and commercial buildings	*	At least 1	11	Aspen, Boulder, Broomfield, Fort Collins (2018), Glenwood Springs, Lafayette, Longmont, Steamboat Springs, Superior, Vail, Westminster
Requires or incentivizes public events to have recycling, composting, or other forms of waste reduction	1 (Vail)	At least 4	17	Arvada, Avon, Boulder, Breckenridge (2021), Broomfield, Commerce City, Cortez, Denver (2022), Erie (2022), Grand Lake, Lafayette (2024), Longmont, Louisville, Mountain Village, Steamboat Springs, Vail (2015), Westminster

** Policy or program adoption dates unavailable.*

Reuse and Waste Reduction Policies and Programs	Number of communities that...			List of communities responding to our survey with policies in place (with year passed or implemented, if available)
	had policies before 2017	added policies since 2017	have policies in place as of Sept. 2026	
Requires the recycling of materials at deconstruction and remodel sites	1 (Fort Collins)	5	6	Aspen (2025), Boulder (2020), Denver (2022), Fort Collins (2012), Glenwood Springs (2023), Lakewood (2018)
Provides an incentive for businesses or schools to switch to reusable alternatives over single-use options (e.g., rebate, grant, or technical assistance program)	*	At least 4	8	Aspen, Boulder (in partnership with PACE), Breckenridge (2026), Erie (2024), Fort Collins (2026), Lafayette (2023), Longmont (in partnership with PACE), Westminster
Requires restaurants to give out single-use foodware (e.g., straws, utensils, and condiment packets) only upon request by the customer ("Skip the Stuff")	0	2	2	Breckenridge (2023), Denver (2021)
Invests in and promotes water refill stations in public places	*	At least 2	16	Aspen, Boulder, Breckenridge, Broomfield, Centennial, Cortez, Denver, Glenwood Springs, Grand Junction, Grand Lake (2019), Lafayette, Longmont, Silverthorne, Steamboat Springs, Superior, Vail (2018)
Either places a fee on single-use plastic and paper bags, or prohibits plastic bags and expanded polystyrene food containers	2 (Boulder and Vail)	At least 8	22**	Arvada, Aspen, Avon, Boulder (2012, 2022), Breckenridge (2021), Brighton, Centennial, Cortez (2023), Denver (2019), Durango (2023), Fort Collins (2025), Grand Junction, Lafayette, Lakewood, Las Animas, Littleton (2023), Longmont, Louisville (2021), Mountain Village, Silverthorne, Steamboat Springs (2019), Vail (2015)
Reduces single-use plastics above and beyond what is required by the Plastic Pollution Reduction Act (e.g., prohibiting additional materials, expanding the entities that must comply, requiring a higher fee on paper bags)	*	At least 3	7	Aspen, Boulder, Breckenridge (2023), Cortez, Denver (2021), Longmont, Steamboat Springs (2019)

** Policy or program adoption dates unavailable.*

*** While the Plastic Pollution Reduction Act sets a statewide model for requiring a fee on paper checkout bags and prohibiting plastic checkout bags as well as expanded polystyrene food serviceware, the law leaves enforcement up to the discretion of local governments. Some local governments are not actively enforcing the law.*

Notes on data: Data presented here is provided by municipal staff and research conducted by Eco-Cycle. This information is not exhaustive and does not include all communities in Colorado; it only reflects responses from the communities that filled out our survey in September 2026. Dates listed may indicate either when the ordinance was passed or when it was implemented. Where a program's start date is unknown, the date is not listed.

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87 Data presented here is provided by municipal staff and research conducted by Eco-Cycle. This information is not exhaustive and does not include all communities in Colorado; it only reflects responses from the communities that filled out our survey in September 2026. Dates listed may indicate either when the ordinance was passed or when it was implemented. Where a program's start date is unknown, the date is not listed.