

oppaga Progress Report



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Department Taking Steps to Improve State Agencies' Recycling Efforts, Encouraging Commercial Sector

at a glance

The Department of Environmental Protection has taken steps to implement our recommendations to increase state agency recycling and encourage recycling in the commercial sector.

The 2002 Legislature replaced the Recycling and Education Grant Program with three grant programs that provide funding for local solid waste activities, including recycling.

Scope

In accordance with state law, this progress report informs the Legislature of actions taken by the Department of Environmental Protection in response to a 2002 OPPAGA report.^{1,2} This report presents our assessment of the extent to which the department has addressed the findings and recommendations included in our report.

¹ Section [11.45\(7\)\(f\)](#), *F.S.*

² *Justification Review: Eliminating Recycling Grants and Raising Recycling Rates Could Save Over \$2.5 Million*, [Report No. 02-15](#), March 2002.

Background

In 1988, the Legislature created several initiatives to encourage recycling and waste reduction.³ The Legislature required counties to establish recycling programs and created a state grant program to provide seed money to help counties implement recycling.

The initiatives had several goals:

- reduce the amount of waste going to landfills and incinerators, thereby extending the life of current landfills;
- save money by reducing waste disposal costs and conserving resources by reducing the use of virgin wood, steel, aluminum, and other materials in manufacturing;
- develop markets that promote the recycling industry; and
- create jobs at businesses engaged in recycling.

The Department of Environmental Protection administers the state's Recycling Program. The department allocated \$284,000 and six full-time equivalent positions to the program in

³ Chapter 88-130, *Laws of Florida*.

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Fiscal Year 2003-04. Department employees provide technical assistance to state agencies, state universities, and state courts, which are required to establish recycling programs. In addition, department employees collect recycling data from counties, provide technical assistance on recycling to local governments and businesses, and administer grants to county governments.

The Department of Management Services also plays a role in the state's recycling activities. State law requires the department to review and revise procurement procedures and specifications for the purchase of recyclable materials.⁴ It also administers an agreement with a solid waste hauling company that collects office paper from state office buildings in Tallahassee and transports the paper to a local recycling company.

State law requires all state agencies to ensure that their procurement policies result in purchasing recyclable materials to the maximum extent feasible. State agencies must report their total expenditures on recyclable and virgin materials to the Department of Management Services.

Prior Findings _____

State agencies and universities were doing a poor job in recycling materials

Our 2002 report determined that state agencies and universities were doing a poor job in carrying out their statutory responsibilities to recycle materials.

- Although 15 of the 18 agencies that responded to our survey provided separate containers for recyclable materials and garbage in their employees' offices, 9 of them reported that their janitorial staff did not always keep the materials separate when picking up the trash.

- Only three agencies kept track of the volume of recycled waste although the law required that all agencies do so.
- Six of the eight universities reported recycling a variety of materials from office paper to batteries. However, solid waste staff at two universities did not know what areas, if any, on campus had recycling containers.

The effects of state agencies' weak recycling efforts were especially evident in Leon County, which had approximately 44,000 state employees, or more than one-fourth of the county's non-agricultural employment. Tallahassee/Leon County solid waste managers estimated that over half (50% to 70%) of the contents of dumpsters transported to the county landfill from state office buildings in Tallahassee could have instead been recycled. Our field observations verified that the dumpsters contained large quantities of office paper that was readily recyclable.

We recommended that the Legislature transfer responsibility for administering the state's recycling contract from the Department of Management Services to the Department of Environmental Protection. We also recommended that the Department of Environmental Protection work with state agencies to improve their recycling programs. In addition, we recommended that the Governor's Office, agency heads, the Board of Education, and university presidents ensure that agencies and universities comply with the state's recycling laws.

Commercial recycling had the greatest potential for growth

Our 2002 report also found that only 43% of commercial businesses in the state participated in recycling compared to 74% of single family households. This was problematic because commercial businesses accounted for 61% of the total tonnage of recycled waste in Florida.

⁴ See s. [287.045](#), *F.S.*

Factors contributing to this condition included recycling services not being available for commercial businesses and local recycling programs primarily emphasizing residential recycling.

We recommended that the Department of Environmental Protection work with local governments to promote recycling to commercial businesses.

Recycling and education grants should be phased out

OPPAGA reports issued in 1996 and 1999 concluded that state recycling and education grants had served their purpose by aiding in establishment of county recycling programs and recommended that state funding for these grants be phased out.⁵ The Legislature addressed these recommendations by reducing funding for these grants from \$10.1 million in Fiscal Year 1997-98 to \$2.5 million in Fiscal Year 2001-02.

Our 2002 report recommended that the Legislature continue to phase out these grants, which would result in a cost savings of \$2.5 million.

Current Status _____

Recycling contract not transferred, but the Department of Environmental Protection has taken steps to help state agencies improve their recycling programs

The Legislature has not implemented our recommendation to transfer responsibility for the state's recycling contract from the Department of Management Services to the Department of Environmental Protection. However, the Department of Environmental Protection has taken action to address our

recommendation that it work with state agencies to improve their recycling programs.

In 2002, the Department of Environmental Protection implemented the Greening Florida Government Program, which was intended to encourage recycling and other waste reduction measures in state office buildings. Program activities included distributing new recycling containers with instructions for recycling white office paper, corrugated cardboard, and other materials.⁶ The department also posted information about this program on its website and plans to distribute a quarterly recycling electronic newsletter to all state agencies in the spring of 2004.

Department of Environmental Protection program managers have worked with building managers and employees in 14 state-owned buildings in Tallahassee to help them improve agency recycling programs. These efforts appear to be having a positive effect on recycling among state agencies. For example, the department's review of sampled agency recycling bins determined that that garbage contamination in the bins declined after the Greening Florida Government Program was implemented. In addition, Leon County solid waste managers reported a 5% increase in the volume of recyclable newspapers and a 45% increase in the volume of recyclable cans and bottles from the Capitol between 2002 and 2003.

The program managers also have met with individual agency building managers to discuss improving recycling in other facilities occupied by state employees. They plan to hold group meetings with building managers in 2004. Further, in November 2003, Department of Environmental Protection and Department of Management Services' managers met to discuss establishing a contract

⁵ *Review of the Recycling and Education Grants Program Within the Department of Environmental Protection*, OPPAGA Report No. [95-46](#), April 1996, and *Progress Report: Recycling and Education Grant Program*, OPPAGA Report No. [99-03](#), August 1999.

⁶ White office paper includes high-grade white typing paper, computer printouts, and copier paper. Its fiber content is more robust than other paper and makes it more valuable for recycling.

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with a local solid waste hauling company and a recycling company to collect recyclable white office paper from state buildings in Tallahassee. White office paper is one of the few recyclable commodities for which there is currently a viable market.

The Department of Environmental Protection has encouraged commercial recycling in specific industries

The Department of Environmental Protection has taken action to address our 2002 report's recommendation that it promote recycling to commercial businesses. Since our 2002 report's release, the department has taken steps to encourage more commercial recycling, such as promoting waste reduction activities by hospitals and the lodging industry. However, it is too early to tell if these efforts have increased recycling rates. Department employees have collected baseline recycling data for the lodging industry and plan to assess changes in recycling in 2005. The department also has continued other activities such as providing recycling loans to small businesses and giving firms of all sizes information about federal waste reduction programs.

Recycling grants program replaced

The 2002 Legislature replaced the department's Recycling and Education Grant Program with three grant programs:

- a competitive grant program for local governments and non-profit organizations that use innovative processes and technologies for recycling and waste reduction;
- a consolidated grant program for counties with populations under 100,000 for general solid waste management activities; and
- a waste tire grant program available to all counties.⁷

Local governments receiving consolidated grants have the flexibility to spend all or part of the funds for recycling and education activities.

⁷ [Chapter 2002-291](#), *Laws of Florida*.

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