



PARTNERSHIP ON
WASTE & ENERGY
Hennepin | Ramsey | Washington

Partnership on Waste and Energy 2020 Annual Report

Letter from the Chair

The Partnership on Waste and Energy (PWE) is a joint powers board between the Ramsey/Washington Recycling & Energy Board and Hennepin County. PWE, established in 2017, is the organization through which Hennepin, Ramsey and Washington counties collaborate on solid waste management issues. Serving over two million residents, the three counties work together through PWE to develop policy, research waste processing technologies and communicate with the public about issues related to waste management.

2020 was a challenging year. Faced with the need to provide essential solid waste services while keeping staff and the public safe during a pandemic, the counties were able to share information that helped them adapt operations, prioritizing safety and continuing service delivery throughout the pandemic.

- Victoria Reinhardt, Ramsey County Commissioner and 2021 PWE Board Chair



Governance and Administration

PWE is governed by a board of three county commissioners, including the chair and vice chair of the Ramsey/Washington Recycling & Energy Board (Ramsey County Commissioner Victoria Reinhardt and Washington County Commissioner Fran Miron, respectively) and Hennepin County Commissioner Debbie Goettel. The chair of the PWE Board rotates annually, and in 2020 the chair was Commissioner Goettel.

Ramsey/Washington Recycling & Energy serves as the administrative agent for PWE, providing financing, procurement and planning services to the partnership.



Legislative Work

PWE, through its legislative advocacy efforts, seeks to reduce waste, promote renewable energy and enhance the health and resiliency of its communities while advancing equity and responding to the challenges of a changing climate. Each year the PWE governing board adopts a [legislative platform](#). In the 2020 legislative session, PWE's lobbying activities included advocacy for the following:

Market development for recyclables

Food waste reduction initiatives

Wood waste management through biomass energy

Financing for solid waste infrastructure

PWE board members and lobbyists engaged with legislators around these topics, providing written and oral testimony, and continued ongoing collaboration with partners toward common goals.

Emerald Ash Borer and Wood Waste Management



PWE continues to focus on wood waste resulting from Emerald Ash Borer (EAB). EAB kills ash trees, and all ash trees are susceptible to EAB, which has spread to at least 26 Minnesota counties. The volume of wood waste will increase as the infestation of trees continues to accelerate. In the metro area, this will result in over 1.67 million tons of wood waste that needs to be properly handled as EAB spreads through the region.

Counties are charged with the responsibility of managing solid waste. The volume of ash wood waste that is being generated due to EAB is challenging our communities' capability to properly manage it. Wood waste, by law, cannot be landfilled. It cannot be delivered to a resource recovery facility. Nor is open burning allowed. One option is landscape mulch, but those markets are nearly at capacity. The only practical outlet at this time is using it as a fuel for the Saint Paul District Energy facility, but

this option faces an unsure future due to uncertainty about its power purchase agreement with Xcel. PWE has been involved in discussions with state agencies and the legislature to voice support for the service provided by Saint Paul District Energy. Other reliable markets for this material are difficult to find, and PWE also advocates for the development of alternative uses for wood waste.

Work on Anaerobic Digestion

Since 2018, PWE has worked with Great Plains Institute (GPI) to explore anaerobic digestion (AD) as a technology to capture the resource value of organic waste in Minnesota. In 2020, GPI built on previous work to expand this exploration, including research to identify specific steps that can facilitate the development of new AD projects in Minnesota. This was undertaken through additional stakeholder meetings, interviews and literature review, as well as case studies of other US states' policies that support and incentivize AD. The project culminated in a report of policy and regulatory considerations presented to the Partnership Board in December 2020 and [published online](#).



Online Training for Hazardous Waste Generators

The COVID-19 pandemic created a disruption in the regular course of business, including hazardous waste compliance programs and the businesses they regulate. Training on proper management of hazardous waste is an essential function, and businesses are required to complete this training. Due to the pandemic, offering this training in a classroom setting was not feasible. Additionally, even before the pandemic, feedback from many businesses indicated a growing interest in an online training that could be completed at their convenience.



Ramsey, Hennepin and Washington counties' compliance staff identified an opportunity for collaboration. Using Hennepin County's well-established online training content as a foundation, the three counties adapted the video materials to meet all three of the counties' needs and regulations. The project also allowed the counties to offer the training in Spanish and include closed captioning. This partnership also provides the opportunity to develop the training in other languages in the future.

Battery Campaign

When improperly disposed of, batteries can create fire hazards that presents risks to waste management facilities like those owned by the counties, not to mention the people who work in those facilities. In 2020, the counties, through PWE, initiated a communication campaign to educate the public about proper battery disposal. The campaign will debut in 2021.



Financials

Each year the board approves a budget for the following fiscal year, which aligns with the calendar year. In 2020 the PWE budget was as follows:

Personnel	\$10,536	R&E staffing support to PWE for planning, accounting, and contract management
Hazardous Waste Training	\$5,000	Online training for hazardous waste generators.
Lobbying Services	\$74,975	Contracts with lobbying firms of Capitol Hill Associates and Fryberger Law Firm.
Anaerobic Digestion	\$50,000	Contract with Great Plains Institute to explore anaerobic digestion opportunities.
Insurance	\$1,121	Organizational insurance
Total	\$141,632	



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