

Partnership on Waste and Energy

A Circular Economy Reduces Waste and Keeps Materials in Use

The Partnership on Waste and Energy (PWE) seeks to end waste, promote renewable energy and enhance the health and resiliency of communities we serve while advancing equity and responding to the challenges of a changing climate.

The circular economy extends the life of resources and materials - using them to their greatest potential. Our current economic model is linear – materials are used to create products which are disposed of when no longer wanted. In a circular economy, the emphasis is on designing waste and pollution out of the system and on keeping products and materials in use to continue serving the economy. To maintain recycling leadership, Minnesota needs to join other states in advancing circular economy policies.

Linear Economy



Circular Economy



Ending waste begins with reducing what is generated

Policies that support reuse systems, emphasize design requirements and prevent wasted food will have the greatest impact in reducing waste, health risks and greenhouse gases.

- Research suggests that doubling the useful life of clothing, household furnishings and supplies through repair is equivalent to increasing vehicle efficiency by 15% or reducing greenhouse gas emissions by an equivalent of 2.5 million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO₂e).¹
- The USDA estimates over 1/3 all available food is lost or wasted.² ReFED estimates this contributes 4% to US total greenhouse gas emissions.³
- In a circular economy, materials that do not adversely affect human and environmental health are preferred. Policies that reduce or eliminate toxic materials result in safer products that can be more easily recycled into new products or returned to the soil through composting.

¹ www.pca.state.mn.us/air/consumption-related-emissions

² www.usda.gov/foodlossandwaste

³ www.pca.state.mn.us/waste/prevention-wasted-food

Value waste as a resource, not a problem to manage

Unwanted materials should not be considered a waste, but a resource to be preserved for future use.

- Investments in reuse and recycling infrastructure are needed to prevent otherwise unwanted materials from ending up in the trash. Based on 2021 commodity data, more than \$50 million of potential revenue from recyclable materials is lost to the waste stream in PWE counties each year.
- Policies supporting education for the community, placing more responsibility on product producers and funding better material recovery allows for the byproducts of everyday life to be repurposed in meaningful ways.

Contact for More Information

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