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Minnesota officials tout new law requiring refillable, reusable, recyclable or compostable packaging by 2032

The EPA estimates that household waste increases by 25% between Thanksgiving and New Year’s Day



By **TALIA MCWRIGHT** | tmcwright@pioneerpress.com | Pioneer Press

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A pile of unboxed packaging used by Choo Choo Bob's Train Store demonstrates the amount of waste the store throws away on a regular basis. The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency along with local elected officials and businesses gathered at Wednesday, Dec. 18, 2024, at Choo Choo Bob's in St. Paul, to discuss a new policy that will phase out packaging in Minnesota that is not refillable, reusable, recyclable or compostable by 2032. (Talia McWright / Pioneer Press)

Minnesotans generate about 6 million tons of waste each year, according to the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency. In new efforts to reduce the harmful impacts, the state is adopting policy geared toward decreasing that tonnage.

The MPCA, local officials and business leaders gathered Wednesday at [Choo Choo Bob's Train Store](#) in St. Paul to discuss a new law that aims to phase out packaging in Minnesota that is not refillable, reusable, recyclable or compostable by 2032.

"Right now a lot of times when a consumer wants to do the right thing and recycle something, they look at the packaging and face disappointment because the material can't be recycled – their only choice is the trash can," Assistant Commissioner Kirk Koudelka said at the event. "We want to change that here in Minnesota."

Minnesota became the fifth state in the country to pass the "[Packaging Waste](#)

"We need a systemwide approach to it and that's why we think manufactures are the best place to handle that," Koudelka said.

The new law applies to most packaging and paper products sold, offered for sale, distributed or used to ship a product within or into Minnesota, including online purchases and shipments.

Exceptions include packaging for infant formula, drugs or medical devices and packaging for certain hazardous products.

Koudelka said the initiative will not only improve sustainability practices, but will also bring societal and economic benefits, like creating new jobs.

"Two-thirds of what we throw away today in our trash cans is recyclable, compostable or could have been prevented; that amounts to about 143 million dollars in materials," Koudelka said. "If we were to capture that instead, and turn that into good-paying jobs, we'd have over 15,000 green jobs because of our good work."

Other benefits discussed include a decrease in waste, safer packaging, an increase in recycling locations and processes and reduced packaging costs.

What is the manufacturer's responsibility?

Manufacturers will be responsible for covering most costs associated with the refill, reuse, recycling or composting of packaging and paper products – which in turn reduces the cost of what residents, local government and others would pay, according to Koudelka.

"When this is fully implemented in a few years, you will see a reduction in your recycling bill," Koudelka said. "You're going to see a reduction on your bill because now the manufacturers are covering the cost of it."

Manufacturers are also responsible for ensuring that all packaging



MPCA Assistant Commissioner Kirk Koudelka. (Mary Divine / Pioneer Press file)

“It is about the producers changing the way they’re doing things and taking responsibility for their products” Ramsey County Board Chair [Victoria Reinhardt](#) said.

The need is especially apparent this time of year: The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency estimates that household waste in America increases by 25% between Thanksgiving and New Year’s Day.

“This is something that we have to take care of and we need to take care of it now for future generations,” Reinhardt said.

Rolling out the plan

The MPCA has created a nonprofit Product Responsibility Stewardship Organization that includes close to 20 large-brand leaders and will eventually include all manufacturers in Minnesota, tasked with devising a plan on how to implement the policy across the state.

The agency also created an advisory board comprised of local units of government that will “make sure the program meets the needs of Minnesota,” according to Koudelka.

“This is a big effort and there will need to be changes in building up the system and that will take some time,” Koudelka said. “But we were smart in how we built the law and the legislators who authored it, in that it provides time for us to collect data, put together an organized plan and move forward.”

Read more about the Packaging Waste and Cost Reduction Act at pca.state.mn.us/air-water-land-climate/extended-producer-responsibility-for-packaging.

How to reduce and recycle holiday waste

Minnesotans often have questions about how to reduce holiday waste with questions such as “Can I recycle wrapping paper?” the MPCA says.

Here are some tips on reducing waste this holiday season:

- Stay away from wrapping paper that contains foil, plastic or glitter as it will not decompose. Instead, use paper-based wrapping paper or reusable packaging.

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