

WASHINGTON COUNTY COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

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Helping Washington County
Communities Plan for Tomorrow

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WCCOG Awarded USDA Solid Waste Management Grant

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The Washington County Council of Governments (WCCOG) has obtained a \$42,385.00 Solid Waste Management Grant from the Rural Utilities Service of the USDA. “We are planning to do two things with the grant, says Judy East, WCCOG’s executive director. “On one side, we will be working with residents, transfer station managers and municipalities to develop programs to permanently increase recycling rates in Washington County. On the other side, we will work with the same partners to organize up to three collections of household hazardous waste, universal waste and pharmaceutical waste.” Funds will not start until the new federal fiscal year in October, 2010. In the mean time WCCOG staff members are getting the word out.

While recycling rates are reasonably high in some parts of Washington County, there is significant room for improvement. “Boosting recycling rates is a cost saving strategy,” says Jeremy Gabrielson, senior planner with WCCOG. “We’re not operating small municipal dumps anymore. Our trash gets shipped away for disposal. Even aside from the market value of bulk recyclables, if we can reduce our waste stream county wide, our communities save on trucking and disposal fees.”

Many factors contribute to Washington County’s variable recycling rate. WCCOG will work with transfer station managers to identify new opportunities. “When we submitted this grant, we asked transfer station managers what their issues were,” says Gabrielson. “Do we have the

right equipment to handle recyclables and move them efficiently to market? Are there opportunities for us to improve recycling by partnering with the private sector?.”

WCCOG staff will work with regional transfer stations to work on solutions for storage, containment, compaction, shipping and markets for the sorted recyclable materials, and assist in securing funds for facilities to support financially sustainable recycling programs.

A second part of the USDA Solid Waste Management Grant addresses disposal of household hazardous waste, universal waste, and unused pharmaceutical products. “Disposal of these products present challenges to rural residential households,” says East. Household hazardous waste includes such leftovers as paints, pesticides, cleaning solvents, and motor oil. Even in small quantities, these items require special disposal methods to avoid creating health and safety hazards for residents and sanitation workers.

Universal waste describes widely generated wastes that do not present significant hazards in the small quantities generated by a single household, but nonetheless present a cumulative hazard to public health and the environment. Examples include electronic waste (TV sets, audio equipment, computer components, etc.), some types of batteries, and compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFLs). A new Maine law restricts the disposal of universal waste to keep these toxic substances from accumulating in conventional landfills.

Leftover pharmaceuticals present both poisoning hazards and security risks to the prescribed users, as the theft of prescription medicines is an unfortunate current reality. The most common disposal methods for pharmaceutical waste – flushing unused supplies down the toilet or disposing of them in landfills – can lead to surface and groundwater contamination. Sanitation workers can also be injured or infected by improperly disposed syringes and medical cleansing solutions.

WCCOG organized the first regional household hazardous waste collection in 2005. The program collected over 325 units of household hazardous waste and received a lot of positive public feedback. However, the total cost of planning and conducting the pilot program was so high that WCCOG has not been able to offer any repeat collections. “The USDA grant allows us to organize another, expanded collection, says East, and a Maine-based firm is now available to bid on the collection so we hope to realize significant savings over the 2005 collection”, says East.

As in 2005, WCCOG will work with communities to develop a fair and manageable cost-sharing formula to encourage local governments to participate in up to three collections for household hazardous waste, universal waste and pharmaceutical waste in the summer of 2011. Residents from non-participating municipalities will also be able to dispose of their HHW/UW and pharmaceutical wastes by paying a per-item fee.

The Washington County Council of Governments (WCCOG) is a non-profit municipal membership organization that provides a wide range of land use planning services to its member communities in Downeast Maine. WCCOG is exclusively owned and operated by its member communities, County government, the Unorganized Territories and local development groups.