



Recycling: A Cornerstone of Sustainability

Recycling and reusing materials that would otherwise be discarded is a key component of environmental sustainability. Sustainability is meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. The three elements of sustainability -- *environmental stewardship*, *economic development* and *social responsibility* -- are interdependent, and recycling exemplifies all three.



Recycling Generates Many Sustainability Benefits

Recycling has numerous environmental and economic advantages. It:

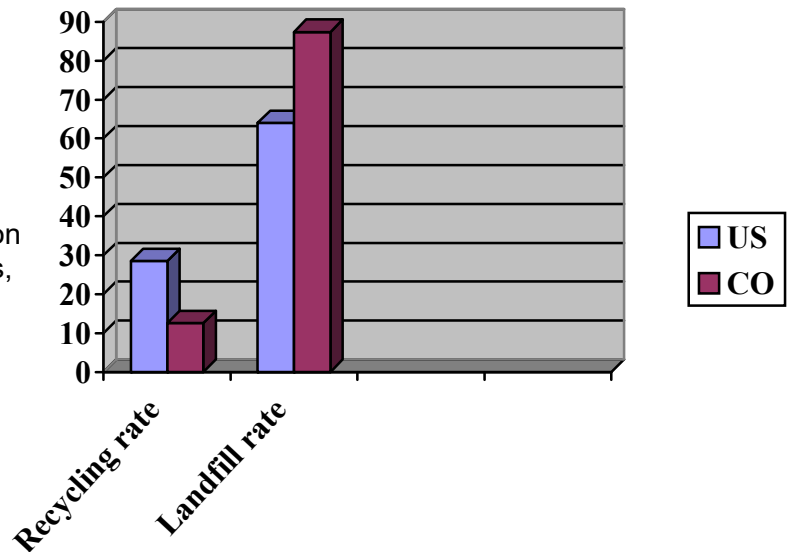
- Creates more jobs than the landfilling industry.
- Saves energy and reduces pollution by reducing the need to extract and transport virgin resources.
- Greatly reduces GHG emissions, including harmful methane
- Allows for reuse of materials and finite resources thereby conserving resources for future generations.

Recycling businesses capitalize on discarded waste by extracting materials and diverting them to valuable uses. In states that have fostered a pro-recycling business environment, there is a twofold benefit: jobs are created and the environment is protected. Recycling is a young industry that holds much promise for Colorado, if state policies were adopted to help level the playing field between recycling and more mature industries (such as mining, oil and gas extraction and landfilling), which developed during a time of fewer regulations (e.g., fewer environmental laws, minimum wage requirements, insurance premiums, etc.) and with some government assistance.

Colorado's Recycling Efforts Do Not Stack Up

- U.S. overall recycling rate: 34%
 - Colorado recycling rate: 12.5%
- U.S. overall landfill rate: 64%
 - Colorado landfill rate: 87.5%

Colorado is currently ranked at 41st in the nation for recycling, putting us well behind most states, according to *BioCycle Magazine*.



Recycling Can Enhance Colorado's Economy

Despite its sizeable economic potential, Colorado has overlooked recycling as an area of economic growth.

- Collecting and processing recyclable materials creates at least five times more jobs than landfilling these materials. According to the Institute of Local Self-Reliance, for every job created per ton of waste in the landfill and incineration sector, 10 jobs could be created processing recyclables. According to Gracestone, Inc., over 130 jobs are, and 296 jobs could be, created in the electronics reuse and recycle industry per 10,000 tons of e-scrap.
- The jobs created through recycling require a full spectrum of labor from low to high skilled positions.
- Colorado is not getting its fair share of these jobs since our recycling industry is underdeveloped.
- Recycling is cost effective when programs are run efficiently, whether by the public or private sector.
- Recycling is even more cost effective when life cycle cost analyses are considered.
- Recycling stimulates development of green technologies.

Recycling Protects the Environment

- Recycling conserves natural resources.
- Recycling reduces greenhouse gas emissions and pollution.
- Recycling extends the life of landfills, saving the public from the costs associated with siting new landfills and the risks associated with eventual landfill leakage.
- It is important to reduce our reliance on foreign oil. Recycling helps us do that by saving energy.
- Recycling leaves habitat intact for wildlife by reducing our demands for fossil fuel extraction.

State Government Should Take the Lead in Promoting Recycling

- By creating a program focusing on recycling market development, as Arizona, Pennsylvania and New York have done, Colorado could attain the national average recycling rate of 30% of our materials currently going to landfills. This would equate to over two million tons of diverted materials, translating into savings of over 50 million BTUs of energy, reducing pollutants by over 2.5 million tons, and using 10 million fewer trees.
- Several Colorado communities have reached impressive levels of recycling. In 2004, Loveland was diverting 57% of its residential waste stream from landfilling – creating more jobs without raising trash fees.
- The state can play a role in supporting market development of recycled materials by enacting environmentally preferable purchasing policies for state government by requiring purchase of products with recycled content.

Policy Recommendations

Achieving Colorado's recycling potential will help create jobs, spur economic development and protect the environment. Consequently, we urge state lawmakers to support a bill that creates a state role in supporting recycling and waste diversion in Colorado.

For More Information, Please Contact:

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