



General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania  
**Joint State Government Commission**  
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**Short summary in response to 2022 Senate Resolution 285**  
***Recycling Strategies in Pennsylvania***

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Recycling is an important part of Pennsylvania's waste management ecosystem. Recycling provides industry with raw materials, saves resources, and reduces the amount of waste that ends up in a landfill. When it was enacted in 1988, the Municipal Waste Planning, Recycling and Waste Reduction Act set as one of its goals a reduction in the per capita amount of waste generated in the Commonwealth by 1997. Another goal was that, beginning in 1997, at least 25 percent of all municipal waste and source-separate recyclable materials generated in the Commonwealth should be recycled.

Although per capita waste generation did fall for a short period of time before rising in the 2010s, and the Commonwealth has made great strides in recycling since the passage of the Municipal Waste Planning, Recycling and Waste Reduction Act, those goals have not been met to date. While the Commonwealth recycles far more than it did in 1988, in recent years the volume of material recycled in Pennsylvania has fallen as recycling is facing headwinds on numerous fronts. China's ban on the importation of bales of recycled material from the United States, as well as the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath, roiled markets for recycled scrap material and resulted in some municipalities eliminating some plastics and glass from curbside collection. Low oil prices also affected the market for recycled plastic, as it became more economical to make new plastic rather than recycle it.

Contributing to these challenges is the fact that many municipalities rely on grants from the Recycling Fund to offset the cost of providing curbside recycling. These grants are funded by a \$2 per ton charge on municipal waste disposal. This fee has not changed since 1988 and the revenues available for funding grants is becoming insufficient to support recycling operations.

In this report the Commission analyzes recycling policies from around the country, from large-scale programs such as bottle deposit schemes and extended producer responsibility laws to smaller changes such as subsidized loans for equipment and educational outreach, among other policies. Potential amendments to the Municipal Waste Planning, Recycling and Waste Reduction Act are discussed as well. Other policies that are not recycling per se but would help reduce the volume of materials used in packaging or would divert material away from landfills are also analyzed. These include packaging redesign, disposal bans, recycled content mandates, and beneficial uses for end-of-life material.

The Commission ultimately recommends eight statutory changes to the Municipal Waste Planning, Recycling and Waste Reduction Act to improve the efficiency of the Commonwealth's recycling system. After consulting government, academic, and industry sources, it was determined by the Commission that amendments to our existing recycling system would be the best course of action for the Commonwealth, as opposed to any large-scale changes that may upset the existing investments, expectations, and progress that Pennsylvania has made since its advent in the late in 1980s.

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