



# CONNECTICUT RESOURCES RECOVERY AUTHORITY

**COMMENTARY**

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## **Recycling Plan: A New Mandate?** *(From the Waterbury Republican-American)*

By **RAYMOND J. O'BRIEN**

Can we recycle our way out of our trash problem? The Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection thinks so, which is why increased recycling is the centerpiece of its new Solid Waste Management Plan. But municipalities worry this initiative will turn into another unfunded mandate.

Connecticut creates more trash than we can manage with our six trash-to-energy plants. As a result, each year Connecticut ships upwards of 400,000 tons of garbage to landfills in other states. Meanwhile, we recycle about 1.1 million tons of material, or about 30 percent of our solid waste.

Our waste stream is growing while our trash-to-energy capacity is static. The DEP estimates that if our recycling rate remains at 30 percent, Connecticut will be forced to export more than 1.4 million tons of garbage by the year 2024. That's 70,000 additional trucks on our roads.

The DEP figures if we increase our recycling rate to 58 percent by 2024, that capacity shortfall will vanish. That's a worthwhile goal that the Connecticut Resources Recovery Authority will do everything it can to reach.

State law says municipalities are responsible for recycling. But more recycling will cost more money. When recycling was introduced in the early 1990s, the state created a \$42 million trust fund that helped pay for municipal recycling coordinators, collection bins and trucks and a statewide public-education campaign. As that money was spent, the burden was passed to cities and towns. Today, few towns have full-time recycling coordinators and more towns are using private contractors for their trash and recycling collections.

Now the DEP is calling on cities and towns to nearly double their recycling rates. Getting to 30 percent was relatively easy – we collect newspapers, bottles, cans, jars and corrugated cardboard. To get to 58 percent, we'll need to expand the menu of items we collect and we'll need to get more people recycling.

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To pay for this, the DEP suggests recovering unclaimed bottle and can deposits. That would require legislative action CRRA has been seeking for years, but time and again we have been told the bottlers and distributors won't give up that money without a fierce battle.

The DEP also suggests increasing the solid-waste assessment, currently at \$1.50 per ton disposed at all trash-to-energy plants, to pay for its new initiatives.

Guess who pays the lion's share of this tax? Municipalities and taxpayers who pay for their garbage disposal.

Expanding recycling is a worthwhile idea. But it will require cities and towns to expand their collection programs, new facilities to process those materials and public education.

Let's call on our legislators to make sure these costs don't come out of municipal budgets.

*Raymond J. O'Brien is a member of the New Milford Town Council and a member of the Connecticut Resources Recovery Authority Board of Directors.*