

PROP Offers Testimony to State Senate Committee (February 9th, 2000).

PROP Executive Director John Frederick testified before the Senate Environmental Resources and Energy on February 9, 2000. The hearing had been called to gather input on the state of recycling in the Commonwealth. In addition to PROP's testimony, comments were made by DEP Secretary James Seif, ISRI Executive Director Rick Allan, PRC Executive Director Pat Imperato, and the Earth Conservancy. Below is the text of PROP's comments.

The Professional Recyclers of Pennsylvania

The Professional Recyclers of Pennsylvania (PROP) is a non-profit organization of over 300 members representing more than 700 recycling programs in the Commonwealth. In the last year and half, the organization has changed its name, the makeup of its Board of Directors, and expanded its voting membership to include private sector members as well as public sector recycling professionals. Additionally, PROP recently became Pennsylvania's sole affiliate with the National Recycling Coalition and an Advisory Member of the Northeast Recycling Council. We have had positive and cooperative relationships with the Pennsylvania Chapter of the Solid Waste Association of North America (SWANA), the state's grassroots anti-dumping organization, PA CleanWays, and have worked on several projects with the Pennsylvania Resources Council (PRC). The Pennsylvania Composting Association (PACA) will be cooperatively sponsoring several sessions at our annual conference this August here in Harrisburg. We believe that these developments and ongoing relationships further enhance PROP's role as a unified voice for recycling and solid waste professionals and advocates in Pennsylvania.

The Significance of Act 101

More than a decade ago, a well crafted piece of legislation won overwhelming bipartisan support and Act 101 became law. Though, in retrospect, we might like to change a few of the details, the legislation is fundamentally sound. One need only look at the results to prove this point. The Commonwealth recycling diversion rate jumped from 2% to 26% in the first ten years of the program. PROP and its members are particularly proud to have been part of this very successful experiment.

But it should not be viewed merely as a successful experiment for it has fundamentally changed the behavior of millions of Pennsylvanians. Recycling has become second nature to a large majority of our state. Many counties have seen ten-fold increases in recycling. Not since World War II have we seen such a groundswell of support for resource recovery. People see this as an opportunity to help solve a set of problems that they helped create. Business and industry see an opportunity to save both resources and money. I think it is important to understand the remarkable significance of this effort.

- This has not only been a very popular and successful program; it has changed the way we think about trash and waste.
- It has extended the life span of the Commonwealth's landfills. (Our recycling and composting efforts now save more than five million cubic yards of landfill space each year.)
- It has saved immeasurable amounts of energy and reduced the related greenhouse gasses. Resource Recycling Magazine Editor Jerry Powell has noted that recycling in America saves enough energy every year to satisfy the energy needs of 9,000,000 homes. (Last year, just the glass that was recovered for recycling in Pennsylvania, saved more than 200,000 million kilowatt hours of electricity.)
- The environmental degradation of extractive activities have been lessened in a similar manner. (The metals recycled in Pennsylvania last year saved more than a half million tons of metal ore, a quarter million tons of coal, and 10,000 of limestone. Given that waste rock makes up more than 90% of all material disturbed during mining, this recycling prevented the disturbance of upwards of eight million tons of earth in 1999 alone.)

- Most importantly, it has helped us take a notable step toward an economy based on reuse and recycling rather than consumption and waste production.

The Positive Impacts on Business

It comes as a surprise to many that "Green" business practices, like recycling, are not only good for the environment but they are good for the bottom line as well. A study by the Institute for Local Self Reliance in Washington shows that the processing and the re-manufacturing of recyclables generates fifteen times more jobs per ton of waste than landfilling the same material. In our preoccupation to establish exceptional collection programs, we often overlook the fact that recycling adds value to materials that previously had none. One man's trash has indeed become another's treasure. DEP's Annual Report notes that more than 130 Pennsylvania manufacturers now use recyclable materials in their manufacturing process. The Northeast Recycling Council (NERC) has successfully attracted several million dollars in venture capital for recycling companies through their annual Recycling Investment Forums. Close to \$10 million in additional investments are being negotiated.

Don't Let a Good Program Fade Away

Could any of this happen without a dedicated funding source? Perhaps some of it would have, for the scrap industry has a long and successful track record in the Northeast. But it seems unlikely that residential and commercial recycling would have ever reached such heights without the funding that Act 101 has provided. While the seed of recycling has been planted and sprouted, it is now only a sapling. We can nurture and fertilize it or we can let it fend for itself in the wild. Though it may not die, it will surely struggle. Here's why:

- Any educational campaign that changes behavior takes time. Recycling has brought resource conservation into the mainstream, but the educational effort is far from over. (If education worked quickly, after all, hardly anyone would smoke.) This recycling and waste reduction education has made a difference, but to discontinue funding in the next few years would end the work before the job is done.
- We are raising a new generation of recyclers and, more importantly, a generation of young people that are paying attention to resource conservation. The children that were born the year Act 101 was passed are now in fifth grade. They have always had a recycling bin in their house. Yet if funding for recycling dries up in 2004, many of these kids may not have access to a recycling program when they graduate from high school in 2006.
- Newly mandated communities need funding. With the 2000 Census, the number of mandated curbside recycling communities will increase even more. Though alternative funding may be practical for some aspects of established recycling programs, kicking off programs in newly mandated communities will be a difficult and expensive venture for local governments.
- Public sector facilities fill an important niche. In the same way, support for capital expenditures for processing equipment would be sorely missed. Though the private sector capably takes care of most commodities throughout much of the state, public facilities have filled an important void and funding for them is crucial.

It is also noteworthy that there is widespread support for the program.

- Pennsylvanians overwhelmingly support recycling and actively participate in recycling programs in their communities according to a survey commissioned two and a half years ago by the Joint

Legislative Air and Water Pollution Control and Conservation Committee. As drop-off recycling systems and new curbside programs are added, this number grows even larger.

Solid waste professionals, municipal officials, and recycling advocates agree that Pennsylvania's recycling program is fundamentally sound and that funding should continue. When Governor Ridge's Solid Waste Stakeholders Group met in 1997, the diverse group concluded that the program had been successful and should continue.

The Need for a Plan

PROP believes that we need to chart a road map for the future of recycling and composting in Pennsylvania. Whether we continue the program we have or move in a different direction, we need a plan. By law, we require counties to plan for solid waste and recycling for ten years but we have no similar process for the state as a whole.

The new Recycling Market Development Center will play an important role in putting together such a plan but it will not answer all the questions. Education strategies, collection programs, grant administration, and municipal government issues are essential components in the planning process but would fall outside the purview of a Market Center. This planning process is especially important as we approach this funding crossroads in 2004. Though this sounds far off, 2004 is only one municipal hauling contract away. Local government recycling program administrators cannot wait to see what happens. If changes are to take place, provisions to address them must be made soon.

The Professional Recyclers of Pennsylvania are anxious to begin this process. The PROP Board of Directors has charged our Government Liaison Committee with establishing a Strategic Planning Task Force. The Committee is finalizing plans for an early spring meeting to discuss the needs of local government, public recycling professionals, and private sector waste and recycling officials. We hope that today's hearing will mark the beginning of an even better dialogue between recyclers, legislators, and the Department of Environmental Protection. PROP has worked hard to assist local government recycling officials and to facilitate networking between DEP, local government, and recycling professionals throughout the state. Recycling has gone forward because we have all worked hard to make it happen. The Governor and Lieutenant Governor have set a new recycling diversion goal of 35% and we look forward to the challenges of attaining that objective. Be assured that the Professional Recyclers of Pennsylvania will continue to work hard to reach that lofty goal.

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