



2025 Recycling Progress Report

Accelerating a zero-waste future



Hennepin County is committed to a zero-waste future. To make this a reality, we are investing in the highest impact actions in policy, programming, and infrastructure. These actions will help reinvent our solid waste system, achieve our climate-driven zero-waste goals, and ensure everyone has equitable access to zero-waste tools.

We saw significant progress toward waste diversion goals in 2025.

- The overall recycling rate increased from 41% to 50%
- Food donation increased by 50%
- Business and residential organics recycling increased by 15%

The county has achieved a diversion rate that puts us in standing with long-time zero-waste leaders, who divert 50% to 60% of waste.

The county committed significant resources to the implementation of zero-waste strategies in 2025. We increased the waste reduction and recycling budget by \$5.5 million and hired 9 new staff to expand existing programs and develop new initiatives based on community needs and priorities.

We are focused on reducing materials that have the greatest climate impacts, such as food, plastics, and building materials, and are addressing long-standing disparities in access to recycling and organics recycling services, especially in multifamily settings.

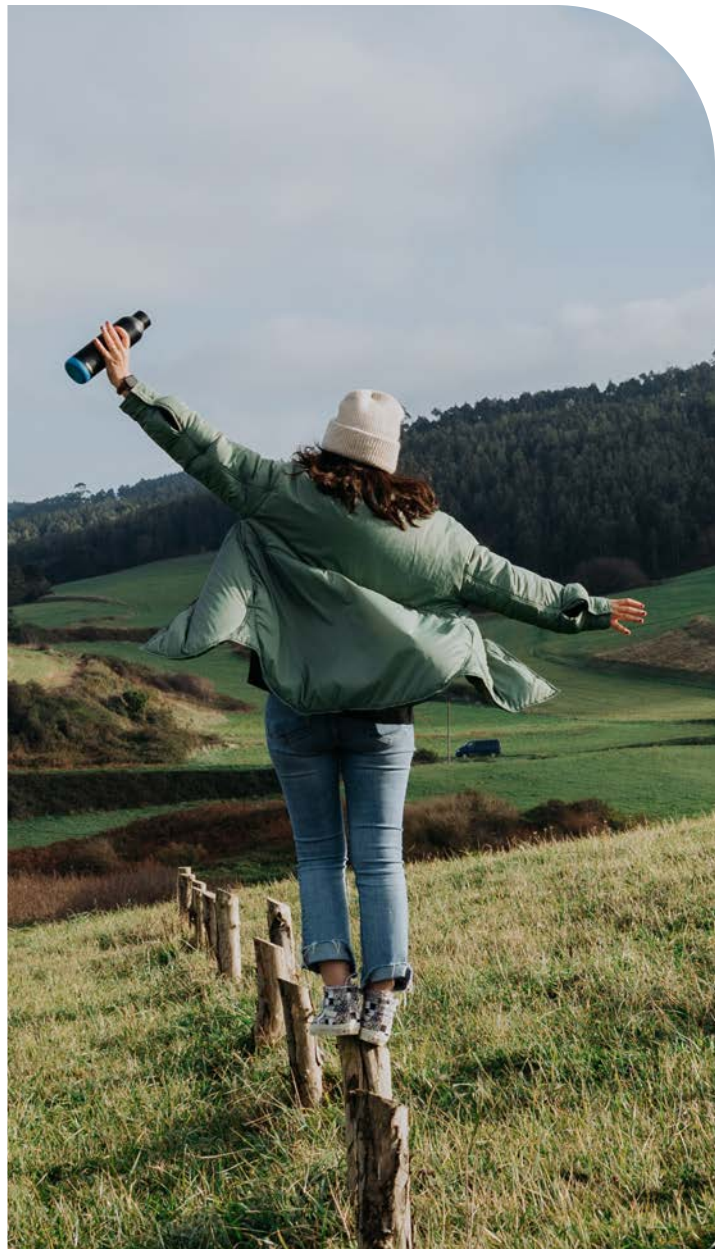
This Recycling Progress Report provides an annual update on our major zero-waste accomplishments, transparency in showing progress toward waste diversion goals, and detailed results from waste reduction and recycling programs.

How you can help

The county has more than 50 programs and initiatives to help residents and businesses reduce waste and recycle more. Stay informed about events and seasonal opportunities like Fix-it Clinics, swaps, and collections, join the plastic-free or save food challenges, become a Community Recycling Ambassador, and more.



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Key accomplishments



Increased food rescue and prevented food waste



Made organics recycling available to residents countywide



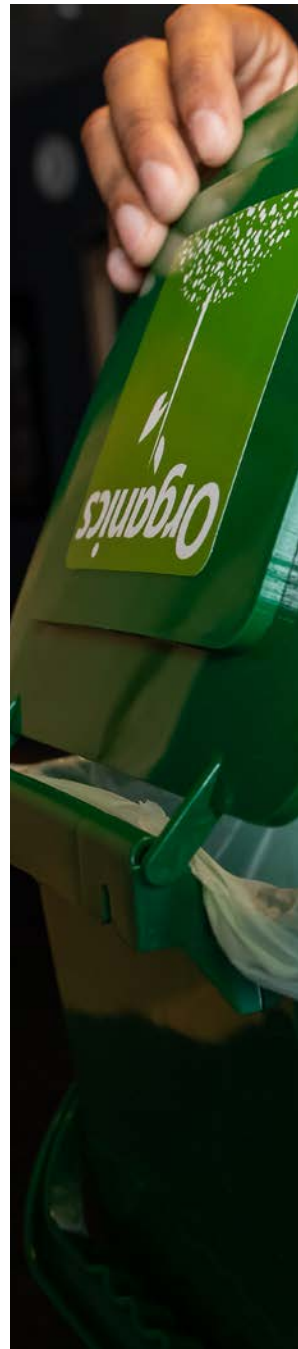
Launched Swap-It events



Funded community-led zero-waste projects



Got more businesses to recycle or donate food





Key numbers

Recycling rate
increased from
41% to

50%

Food donation
increased by

50%

Business and
residential organics
recycling increased by

15%



Invested

\$2 million

invested in 195 projects that
reduce waste, improve recycling,
and engage the community

- \$450,000 in Community Zero Waste grants awarded to support equitable, community-led reduction and reuse solutions
- \$165,000+ awarded for business waste prevention, reuse, and repair initiatives



\$4.47 million

distributed to cities for recycling and
organics recycling programs



Served and engaged

144,973

residents served at drop-off facilities
and collection events

5,900+

students reached through school
recycling education programs

28,238

actions completed by 2,315 participants
in the Plastic-Free Challenge and
Stop Food Waste Challenge

1,654

Fix-It Clinic participants
supported by 146 volunteers
contributing 3,315 hours



Diverted

917,000

single-use plastic items avoided by businesses through MNimize, a partnership with the Waste Wise Foundation that provides support, rebates, and recognition to businesses reducing plastic waste.



7.25 million

pounds collected at drop-off facilities and events



12,538

of household items repaired at Fix-It Clinics, an 84% fix rate

813

mattresses recycled through the multifamily pilot program



11,000

pounds reused and recycled through furniture and building material collection event

Highlights and major accomplishments

Completed a first-of-its-kind Wasted Food Prevention Plan

The county finalized its Wasted Food Prevention Plan, establishing a clear roadmap to reduce edible food waste and support food rescue efforts. The plan sets an ambitious goal of cutting the amount of edible food discarded in half and outlines strategies spanning prevention, rescue, and education in residential, commercial, schools, and food rescue sectors.

The plan builds on existing initiatives such as behavior-change campaigns, grants for food rescue organizations, and partnerships with businesses and community groups. These efforts support multiple county goals: eliminating health disparities by increasing access to healthy foods, supporting climate action by diverting organic materials from the trash, and accelerating progress toward zero waste.



Cut discarded edible
food in half



Achieved countywide implementation of city organics recycling requirements

All 45 cities in the county have met the requirement to make organics recycling service available to residents, marking a major milestone in implementing MPCA requirements and the county's zero-waste policies. Specifically, cities with populations of 10,000 or more must provide curbside organics recycling service, while cities with populations under 10,000 must provide either curbside service or access to an organics recycling drop-off site. This achievement reflects years of collaboration between the county and cities.

With organics recycling service now widely available, the focus is shifting to increasing participation and recovering more organics from the waste stream. Ongoing efforts include outreach, education, and promotions to ensure residents actively use organics recycling services.



120

businesses inspected,
including both initial visits
and follow-ups

90%

compliance rate achieved
among inspected businesses



Improved compliance with the county's recycling ordinance through increased inspections

One of the most impactful requirements in the county's recycling ordinance (Ordinance 13) is a business food waste recycling requirement. Certain types of businesses that generate large amounts of food waste must arrange for organics recycling service and separate food waste from trash.

The county continued to implement recycling requirements by conducting more inspections and improving compliance outcomes. Inspections focused on key sectors such as grocery stores, hospitals, and large food-generating institutions to ensure food waste diversion requirements are met.

Staff also developed a database to better track inspections, follow-ups, and compliance. The new system will improve efficiency, support data-driven decision-making, and enable more strategic targeting of outreach and enforcement efforts over time.

Advanced organized collection for city organics recycling and initiated for the Minneapolis commercial sector

The county's Plan to Reinvent the Solid Waste System calls for a transition to a more organized collection system. Where it has been implemented, this change has led to better outcomes, such as making service more accessible, lowering the cost of service, increasing participation, and reducing the number of trucks on the road. Several cities — Brooklyn Park, Champlin, Hennepin Recycling Group (Brooklyn Center, Crystal, New Hope), Long Lake, Maple Grove, and Minnetonka — have implemented organized collection for organics recycling.

In Minneapolis, the county's work to accelerate zero waste through Board Action 25-0296 included organized commercial collection as a key strategy. The resolution specifically calls for the city to build on their 2017 commercial waste evaluation study by establishing a date to initiate the statutory process to implement organized commercial collection. Advancing this approach will provide better access to recycling services, incentivize waste reduction, increase compliance with existing requirements, reduce truck traffic, and achieve zero-waste outcomes.



Expanded drop-off options

The county completed a gaps analysis to better understand current drop-off services and identify opportunities to expand access to away-from-home recycling options. The study assessed existing facilities, materials accepted, geographic coverage, and access barriers. Opportunities were identified to expand services for bulky materials, hard-to-recycle items, and reusable goods. This analysis provides a clear, data-driven foundation for prioritizing future investments to make recycling and reuse more convenient for residents and ensure more equitable access.

To expand drop-off options, the county partnered with Bridging and other organizations to host a furniture and building materials collection event, diverting nearly 11,000 pounds of material for reuse and recycling. Bridging is a nonprofit organization that helps people transition to stable housing by providing them with essential household goods to furnish their homes, furthering our work in the disparity elimination housing domain.



Expanded the multifamily mattress recycling pilot

The multifamily mattress recycling pilot was expanded to priority properties in environmental justice areas. This service addresses a persistent challenge in multifamily settings where disposal options for large items are limited. Providing targeted support and convenient services reduces illegal dumping, improves property conditions, and increases diversion of recyclable materials.

The program is implemented in partnership with Second Chance Recycling, a nonprofit social enterprise that dismantles mattresses to recover recyclable materials such as metal, foam, and wood while providing job training and employment opportunities for individuals facing barriers to work.

813

mattresses collected
and recycled

43

participating properties

Increased reuse in building construction and renovation sectors

Building Circularity MN is a collaborative initiative launched by the county and funded by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency focused on increasing circularity and reducing waste in construction and renovation projects. The program works directly with property owners, architects, developers, and contractors to incorporate reused materials into projects.

Through this initiative, the county provides free technical assistance to project teams. This includes design support, specification development, and connections to reclaimed material suppliers. The program also facilitates two group-learning cohorts, Material Reuse Pros and Reuse Design leaders. Material Reuse Pros supports market development and helps businesses and entrepreneurs build capacity in the reuse sector. Reuse Design Leaders empowers architects to break through the common barrier in the design process that prevent material reuse.

Together, these efforts are helping grow Minnesota's reuse economy, reduce environmental impacts from construction, and move the building sector toward more circular practices.



Launched Swap-It events and expanded Fix-It Hubs

The county launched its first Swap-It event in October. The theme for the event was fall and winter holiday decor. Participants brought in gently used items that were no longer needed and took ‘new’ stuff home for free. Swap-it events are a fun, sustainable way to reduce waste, share resources, build community, and support local reuse efforts. The work is funded by a grant from the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency. The county is contracting with Reuse Minnesota to offer a series of Swap-It events in 2026.

The county expanded its repair and reuse infrastructure by establishing a second Fix-It Hub at Richfield City Hall, building on the successful hub offered at St. Anthony Library. Fix-It Hubs provide regularly scheduled, community-based repair opportunities that complement larger, monthly Fix-It Clinics. These hubs make repair more accessible, extend the life of household items, reduce waste, and build community connections. Together with Fix-It Clinics, they are a cornerstone of the county’s reuse strategy.



Awarded Community Zero Waste grants

Six Community Zero Waste grants totaling \$450,000 were awarded to support community-led waste reduction, recycling, and organics initiatives. Projects focus on bringing swap events, repair programs, low-waste event planning, and expanded recycling services to underserved communities.

These grants empower local organizations to design and implement solutions that reflect community needs and priorities, advancing both environmental outcomes and equity in the solid waste system.



Free Geek Twin Cities began accepting donations of computers and electronics at mobile collection events, helping reduce transportation and other access barriers for residents. Over 3,350 pounds of electronics were collected at the first mobile collection event.



Little Earth Residents' Association purchased a utility vehicle to make recycling collection easier across its 212-home campus. Recycling has increased greatly, with a once minimally used recycling dumpster now filling twice a week. Property management has increased pickup service and are looking at adding recycling dumpsters.



Oromo Diaspora Media started recycling at three Oromo community sites. The Tawfiq Islamic Center made recycling available for the first time during the Ramadan holy month, with over 600 water bottles recycled every day.



ZIRAN facilitated low-waste events, including hosting a Let It Go Swap and Flea Market with 400 community members and 50 vendor families and offering mending and other low-waste activities at the Twin Cities West Metro Asian Fair.

Received MPCA approval for the county's Solid Waste Management Plan

Hennepin County's Solid Waste Management Plan, dated October 29, 2024, was formally approved by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA), confirming that it meets the requirements and aligns with the 2022-2042 Metropolitan Solid Waste Management Policy Plan.

The MPCA said the county's plan raises the bar for the region, highlighting that the plan includes:

- Strong emphasis on moving materials up the waste hierarchy by prioritizing prevention, reuse, and recycling to conserve resources, protect the environment, and advance a more sustainable, circular economy.
- Innovative and forward-looking strategies, including expanded recycling and organics recycling programs, improved data collection on business recycling, and initiatives to reduce wasted food across multiple sectors.

- New approaches to reuse and repair, such as Fix-It Hubs and expanded reuse opportunities.
- Commitments to sustainable materials management in county-funded projects.
- A thoughtful approach to managing residual waste, recognizing the role of facilities like the Hennepin Energy Recovery Center as an alternative to landfilling.

Overall, the MPCA commended the county's leadership, comprehensive strategy, and commitment to long-term funding and implementation of an effective, sustainable solid waste system.

Established a new Residential Recycling Funding Policy for distribution of SCORE funding

State funding provided through Minnesota's Select Committee on Recycling and the Environment (SCORE) supports local recycling and waste reduction efforts. The county passes 100% of these funds through to cities under the Residential Recycling Funding Policy to support recycling, organics recycling, outreach and education, and multifamily recycling.

The county adopted a new funding policy through Board Action 25-0414 R1 to direct the distribution of SCORE funds to cities. The policy establishes clear expectations for program performance, consistency, and accountability while supporting implementation of recycling and organics recycling programs.

The policy places additional requirements on cities of the first class, defined in state statute as cities having a population of more than 100,000. These cities must demonstrate measurable progress toward zero-waste goals, including by meeting defined performance standards, improving recycling and organics recycling outcomes, and showing consistency with zero-waste goals.

By linking funding to these expectations, the policy strengthens accountability and ensures that investments drive meaningful, measurable results in the state's largest and most impactful jurisdiction.

Accelerated zero waste implementation in Minneapolis

Progress in Minneapolis — the largest city in the county that generates the largest share of the waste stream — has an outsized impact on countywide results, making the city a critical partner in achieving zero waste goals.

The county advanced efforts to accelerate zero-waste implementation in Minneapolis through Board Action 25-0296 R2, which directs the city to demonstrate measurable progress in improving recycling and organics recycling outcomes. The action specifically calls for Minneapolis to strengthen implementation of existing ordinances, expand access to and participation in organics recycling, and improve performance in the commercial sector.

The board action also requires development of measurable performance standards and regular evaluation of the city's progress, with a focus on aligning with the city's policies, state policy, and county zero-waste goals. This establishes clearer expectations for Minneapolis and creates a more structured framework for accountability, performance tracking, and continuous improvement.

Advanced work to complete a feasibility study on recycling recovery facilities

Recovering recyclables from the trash is identified as one of the highest impact zero-waste actions in the county's Plan to Reinvent the Solid Waste System. This approach complements source separation and acknowledges the reality that there are a lot of recyclables in the trash despite the robust efforts of existing recycling and organics recycling programs.

Recycling recovery facilities have the potential to divert the most tons from the trash on the shortest timeline and at the lowest cost compared to all other strategies in the Zero Waste Plan. These facilities sort recyclables from the trash using mechanical, optical, and artificial intelligence (AI) technologies. The feasibility study will evaluate similar facilities, types of equipment and technology, staffing, capital and operating costs,

projected recovery rates, end markets, design options, and more.

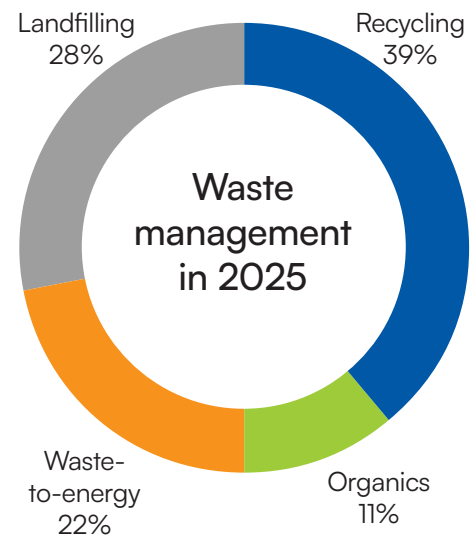
To inform this work, staff visited leading facilities in California where mixed waste processing systems are mature and operate at scale. These visits provided valuable insights into equipment performance, material recovery rates, operational considerations, and market development strategies. Lessons learned will be incorporated into local planning to ensure the proposed system is grounded in proven approaches while tailored to the county's needs.

Progress toward waste diversion goals

Total waste generated and how it's managed

In 2025, almost 1.6 million tons of solid waste, which includes recycling, organics, and trash, were generated in Hennepin County. Of the total tons generated, 50% was managed as recycling and organics. The remaining 50% was managed as trash at waste-to-energy facilities or landfills.

The recycling rate increased from 41% in 2024 to 50% in 2025



Changes in waste management

Recycling increased significantly in 2025 and, along with a modest increase in trash tonnage, drove an increase in total waste generation. These changes mostly reflect improvements in measurement and reporting systems rather than sudden changes in the behavior of residents and businesses. These improvements are described on page 22.

2025 results compared to 2024

Waste stream	Percent change	Tonnage change
Recycling/organics	Up 44%	Up 238,000 tons
Trash	Up 1%	Up 11,000 tons
Total waste	Up 19%	Up 248,000 tons



Continued success with organics diversion

Organics diversion	Percent change	Tonnage change
Food donation	Up 50%	Up 3,700 tons
Business and residential organics programs	Up 15%	Up 4,000 tons

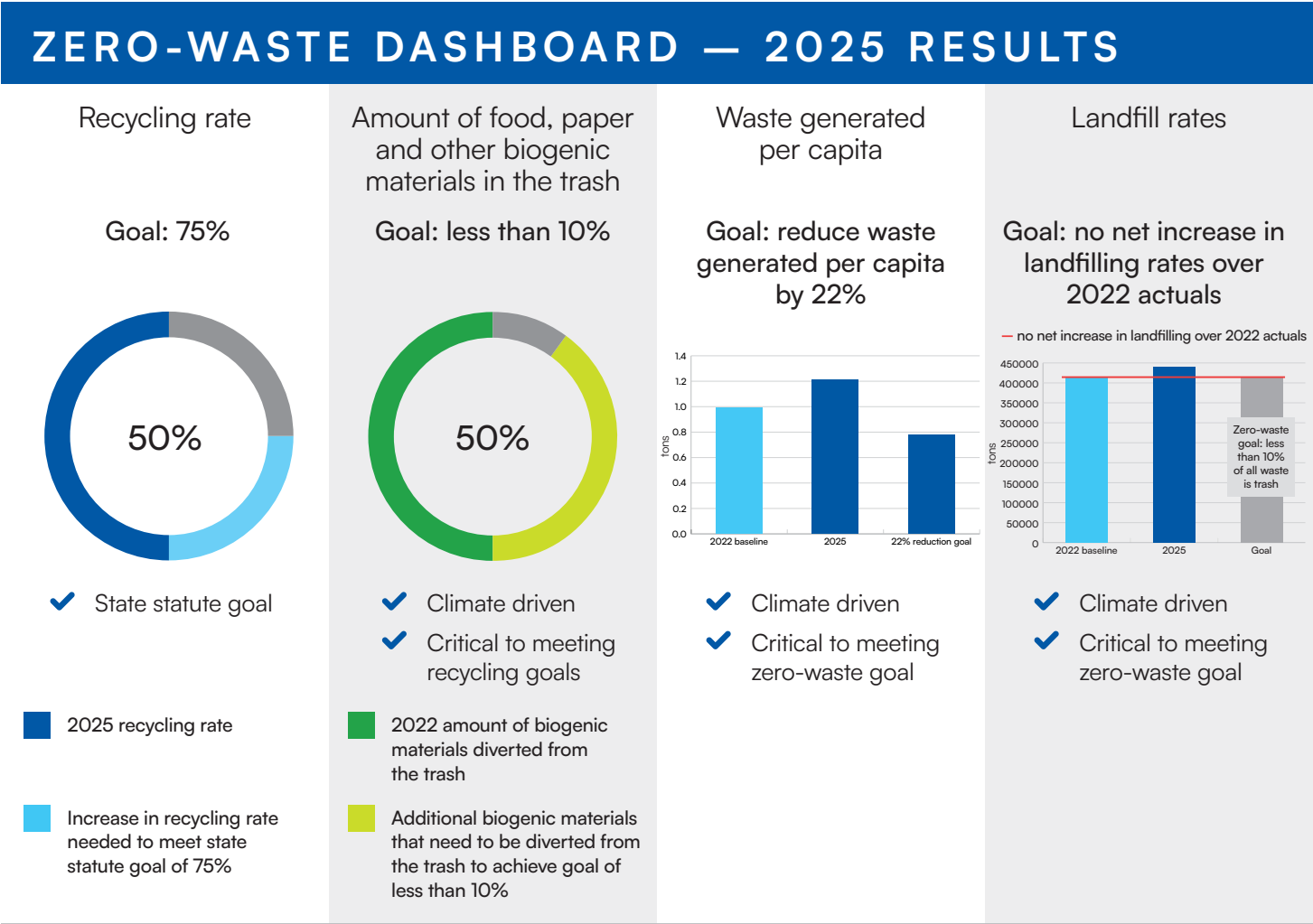
Hennepin County continued to expand programs and partnerships that support food waste prevention, food donation, and organics recycling in both the residential and commercial sectors. County efforts included technical assistance for businesses, grants for organics infrastructure and collection programs, support for food rescue organizations, resident outreach and education, and continued investment in organics drop-off and curbside collection opportunities.

Accelerating a zero-waste future

Hennepin County is accelerating the closure and repurposing of HERC by aggressively pursuing zero-waste policies, programming, and infrastructure.

Because of the county’s climate and equity goals, we can’t depend on landfills to manage our trash. Our only option is to transform the solid waste system. We have a plan of action to transform our system, and this report provides a summary of the accomplishments in 2025.

The county board established a time range (2028 to 2040) and the zero-waste dashboard to define the criteria to be met to responsibly close HERC. The dashboard has four metrics — recycling rate, percent of food and other biogenic materials in the trash, waste generated per capita, and landfill rate — that the county tracks and reports on annually to be transparent in our progress toward meeting our zero-waste goals.



Zero-waste dashboard metrics: 2022 — 2025 and goals

Metric	2022	2023	2024	2025	Goal
Recycling rate	40%	42%	41%	50%	75%
Biogenic material in the trash	About 50%	No study	No study	No study	Less than 10%
Waste generated per capita (tons/person)	1.02	1.03	1.03	1.21	0.78
Landfill rates*	416,138 tons	410,479 tons	411,204 tons	440,512 tons	Less than 416,138 tons

** In 2025, improvements to the county's reporting methodology resulted in a significant increase in recycling tons and a small increase in landfill tons. The landfilling numbers have been revised going back to 2022, and the metrics have been recalculated accordingly.*

We need everyone to get to zero waste

More work is needed to get to zero waste. While we have made progress, we are still collectively discarding more than 800,000 tons of trash each year. That's enough to fill Target Field — from the field to the top of the stands — 6 times.

Even with an incredibly optimistic view of how fast and how well we can implement the highest impact zero-waste actions, we still have a lot of trash to dispose of while we advance these actions. Significant changes in waste management policy, systems, and behaviors are needed to meet our zero-waste goal. Our goal is to ensure that a transition is guided by clear metrics, thoughtful planning, and investments in waste reduction and recycling.



Achieving zero waste is a huge lift. Factors that define high performing leaders are state-level zero-waste policies and higher level of control over the solid waste system.

Everyone has a role to play in reinventing the solid waste system. Achieving zero-waste is only possible with aligned goals and actions, shared responsibility, and mutual accountability with partners. The county is committed to leading the transition to a zero-waste future. By strengthen collaboration, speaking with a stronger collective voice, and remaining focused on our shared goals, we can create a healthier environment for our residents and future generations.

Changes in measurement

In 2025, Hennepin County collaborated through the Partnership on Waste and Energy to improve regional waste measurement and reporting systems across seven metro counties. This work included:

- Evaluating and standardizing reporting methodologies
- Identifying previously unreported waste streams
- Improving MPCA hauler and facility reporting
- Coordinating with metro partners to improve data consistency
- Taking systematic steps to improve measurement practices

Waste is managed by many different public and private entities, and materials routinely cross city, county, and state boundaries before reaching their final destination. Accurate waste measurement is essential for evaluating programs, setting policy, identifying gaps, and making informed infrastructure and funding decisions.

Improvements in 2025 reporting

Several improvements in waste measurement and reporting impacted 2025 and previous years' results. This table summarizes the most significant reporting changes and their impacts on county waste data.

Change	Impact	Explanation
Previously unreported commercial hazardous waste identified	Increased recycling reported for used oil, vehicle batteries, electronics, and other materials	Improved reporting identified commercial hazardous waste streams that were not previously included in recycling totals
Better reporting from big businesses	Increased paper and metal recycling numbers	Staff conducted targeted outreach to large businesses and institutions to obtain recycling data that was not previously captured through existing reporting systems
Wright County disposal tonnage properly attributed to Hennepin County	Increased trash by approximately 35,000 tons	Waste generated in Hennepin County but disposed of at Wright County facilities was not fully captured in prior reporting years
Some wood waste removed from yard waste totals	Decreased yard waste by nearly 5,700 tons	Wood waste previously counted as yard waste was identified as material sent to District Energy in St. Paul and therefore could not be counted as organics recycling
Additional fats, oils, and greases (FOG) identified	Increased organics by more than 5,200 tons	Improved reporting by Sanimax included FOG tonnage from Hennepin County that had not previously been included

Program results

Detailed program results are available in the 2025 Recycling Progress Report Appendix.

This includes results for:

- Reuse and repair
- Outreach and education
- Waste reduction, recycling, and organics recycling
- Drop-offs and special collections
- Recovering recyclables from the trash
- Managing the trash that remains

The Appendix is available at [HennepinCounty.gov/solidwastepanning](https://hennepincounty.gov/solidwastepanning).



